

**Illinois History**  
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## **The Final Debate**

Katie Anderson  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

The seven famous Lincoln-Douglas Debates occurred across Illinois 150 years ago. Perhaps the most famous debate, and the final one, between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas was held in Alton, on October 15, 1858. It helped establish much of the groundwork for the abolition of slavery in the United States.

Newspapers in the day predicted that there would be a large crowd, but in fact this meeting did not attract a large audience. The number of people that came did not even exceed five thousand. It was the second smallest crowd of all the debates.

It was a 115-mile long steamboat ride down the Mississippi River for Lincoln and Douglas to get to Alton. Both candidates arrived very early in the morning, around 5:00 a.m.

When the candidates got there, a large crowd waited for Douglas and a very small one waited for Lincoln. They were each escorted to separate hotels; Douglas to the Alton House, and Lincoln to the Franklin House, where Mrs. Lincoln, and their eldest son, Robert Lincoln, were waiting for him.

People started to arrive to hear the debate throughout the morning. People came on foot, on horseback, by carriage, steamboat and train to hear the debate, which began around 2:00 p.m. A table was set up for the reporters in front of a platform that had been erected for Lincoln and Douglas to give their speeches.

The Alton debate provided the men with their final chances to talk about the issues. This final debate was focused mainly on slavery and the Union. Neither candidate said anything that was really different from past debates. They used most of their time to sum up the arguments that they had started in the past six meetings.

They each had an hour and a half to talk. The first hour was given to Douglas, in which “he devoted his time to an impassioned defense of popular sovereignty, and delivered a renewed attack on Lincoln,” according to Harold Holzer. He talked mainly about how Lincoln would not answer any of his questions on slavery, and he talked about how Lincoln was a bad person for thinking what he thought about slavery.

Douglas also strived in his comments to distance himself from President Buchanan, a fellow Democrat. He was also trying to make himself seem closer to Henry Clay, who was Lincoln’s hero. He also made a strong appeal for unified support for Democrats. He declared that it was the only party for “national men.”

Onlookers reported that Douglas’ voice sounded “completely shattered,” and that he looked “bloated” and “haggard.” On the other hand, people said Lincoln looked “fresh,” but also “stubborn.” He addressed Douglas’ charges clearly, logically and convincingly.

During the second part of the debate, which was a full hour and a half, Lincoln attempted to differentiate between favoring black equality and extending to black the blessings of the Declaration of Independence. He also scolded Douglas for his lack of “statesmanship” because he refused to take a moral position on slavery.

The last half hour was given to Douglas. He resumed his attack on Lincoln's congressional voting record during the Mexican War. He tried to embarrass Lincoln for turning against Henry Clay in 1848 to support a rival Whig, Zachary Taylor, for the presidency. Douglas ended his time, according to Harold Holzer, with a "horrible attack on agitators, who now assailed only slavery but could easily wage war someday soon on another domestic institution."

Soon after the debates, a Democratic newspaper published a thirty-two page pamphlet about the debate in Alton. Other newspapers wrote about the debates, including the *Chicago Times*. Their reporter called Lincoln's speech at Alton, "Most improper and ungentlemanly." The *Chicago Journal* said that Douglas' speeches were "full of spleen, verbose nonsense and weak falsification."

After all of that work by both candidates, Douglas won the election for the United States Senate. Even though Douglas won the election, what Lincoln said about slavery stuck. Today, every state in the United States remains free of slavery. Lincoln's recognition among voters across the country grew as a result of the debates. Many believe that the Lincoln-Douglas Debates were the springboard for Lincoln's election to the presidency two years later.

Out of the seven Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the idea to abolish slavery was presented, and now there is no more slavery. It was clear that Abraham Lincoln did not like slavery, while Stephen Douglas attacked Lincoln for his beliefs. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates played a key role in setting the future course of the United States. [From Edmond Beall, "Recollections of The Lincoln-Douglas Debate," as related to Illinois Historical Society, 1912; Richard Allen Heckman, *Lincoln vs.*

*Douglas*; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Lincoln Douglas Debates of 1858*; and *The Lincoln-Douglas Debate*” as reprinted from the *Alton Daily Courier*, October 16, 1858.]



## **The Freeport Debate**

Ben Bruns  
Oregon High School, Oregon  
Teacher: Sara Werckle

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates were a series of political debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas for one of Illinois' two U. S. Senate seats. Ranging between seven towns, the debates were scattered throughout Illinois, the second debate being in Freeport on August 27, 1858. During the Freeport debate, controversial subjects such as slavery and the Freeport doctrine emerged. Ideas and the opinions of the delegates' views were brought up, which eventually influenced the development of the United States. The debate that took place in Freeport, almost 150 years from now, was an important factor in showing the candidates' position on slavery, contributing to the final outcome of these candidates' future.

Throughout the Freeport debate, both Lincoln and Douglas discussed their significant ideas about various subjects, mainly dealing with slavery. Trying to be subtle, as not to anger or offend citizens who were for slavery, Lincoln expressed his view against slavery when discussing the District of Columbia. He said, "I have my mind very distinctly made up. I should be exceedingly glad to see slavery abolished in the District of Columbia." Though Lincoln was against slavery, he added his belief that a person had the right to own their own slaves. Douglas had a similar view on slavery. His main point was that whether the people wanted, or did not want, slavery, it was their ultimate decision through the lawful government. This was the Freeport doctrine. Lincoln asked if the people of a territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their territory prior to the formation of a state constitution." It is evident that both Lincoln and Douglas

opposed slavery, but Douglas believed it was the people's ultimate decision whether slavery was abolished or not. Stephen Douglas' idea of the Freeport doctrine, and each delegate's view on slavery, were significant ideas that came out of the Freeport debate.

The ideas that emerged from the Freeport debate later influenced developments in America. Many southerners opposed the Freeport doctrine created by Douglas because they did not want there to be a chance of slavery being abolished. Lincoln, on the other hand, was well spoken with practical beliefs with which many people agreed. Even though Lincoln did not win the campaign for the Senate seat, he developed a good reputation and number of followers when he ran for the presidency. Because Southerners did not oppose Lincoln, he was elected president over Douglas. Through his term, Lincoln outlawed the growth of slavery in the nation. Even though he ultimately lost, the Freeport debate was a significant moment for Lincoln, because he gained popularity, resulting in one of America's greatest presidents.

Lincoln and Douglas both voiced their beliefs in the Freeport debate. Both were against slavery, but each had a different approach to it. Douglas made it clear he was against slavery through his speech and ideas. It became clear to the Southerners he wanted slavery to end. Lincoln took a more subtle approach. A historian, Lawanda Cox, wrote that "there is not mistaking the fact that he considered the unequal treatment of free blacks an injustice." Though Lincoln believed slavery was wrong, he was very subtle about this in the Freeport debate so as not to upset slave owners. Cox said, "Lincoln's emotion as well as his sense of justice were stirred by the inequality to which white prejudice subjected blacks." He stated he was against slavery only once during his speech, he mostly kept his opinions to himself. He believed only the people had the

power to end slavery. Though they had different strategies in doing so, both Douglas and Lincoln voiced their beliefs in the Freeport debate.

The Freeport debate was one of seven debates in Illinois between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. In a year, these debates will have taken place 150 years ago. Through the Freeport debate each debater supported significant ideas, which influenced the development of the United States. Even though Lincoln ultimately lost the campaign for the Senate seat, the Freeport debate was a significant moment for Lincoln, resulting in one of America's greatest presidents. Though it did not seem so at the time, this debate was a crucial step in America becoming slavery free. [From Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *The Historian's Lincoln*; Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln*; and Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*.]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Alton**

Sam Bryant  
Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale  
Teacher: Nick Weshinsky

The institution of slavery has been a subject of controversy since its inception. While some believed it to be a guiltless method of free labor, others found it morally wrong. This difference of opinions became more apparent in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. The disagreement became so heated that it became a cause leading to the Civil War in the 1860s. Before the war, however, the dispute over slavery had reached the political level during the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 in Illinois. This series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas was one of the major events leading up to the Civil War. Each debate brought out ideas that helped shape future political views. The final debate in Alton solidified Douglas' opinion of states' rights and Lincoln's abolitionist view on slavery.

Democrat Stephen A. Douglas was steadfast in his stand for popular sovereignty. Although he did not believe slavery was right, he did believe that each state or territory should have the right to choose whether or not to allow slavery. He explained that laws and policies that fit Illinois and Vermont do not fit South Carolina or California. In his opening speech at Alton, he stated "For this reason this Union was established on the right of each State to do as it pleased on the question of slavery, and every other question; and the various States were not allowed to complain of, much less interfere with, the policy of their neighbors." Douglas' view of the Constitution gave each state the right to make their own laws instead of being the subject of national laws. His argument for the people's choice was underscored by his rejection of the Lecompton Constitution, a

constitution proposed for the people of the Kansas territory. This document was made by proslavery delegates without using the vote of the Kansas majority, who overwhelmingly wanted to be a free state. Douglas stated that he opposed the document not because of the slavery section in it, but because it “was not the act and deed of the people of Kansas, and did not embody their will.” Therefore, he was not absolutely proslavery, but fought for the majority’s view. When he brought up the Declaration of Independence, Douglas expressed his belief that blacks were not included in its statement that all men are created equal. He argued that the writers did not mean the minority races when writing the document, only those of European descent. He also explained to the Alton citizens “this government was established on the white basis. It was established by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and should be administered by white men, and none others.” Thus, even if a state voted to be free, Douglas thought that blacks did not have equal rights. Blacks did not have the right to be automatically free, either. Douglas was vague on his own opinion on slavery, but to the extent of states’ rights, he was very clear that he believed in the people’s choice.

In contrast to Douglas, Lincoln expressed an abolitionist view on slavery at the Alton debate, seeing it as morally wrong. Unlike Douglas’ view of popular sovereignty, Lincoln wanted to put an end to slavery in all states. In his reply to Douglas at the Alton debate, he shared his belief that Douglas was starting “a conspiracy to make the institution of slavery national.” Instead of fighting for what the people wanted, Lincoln accused Douglas of trying to make slavery legal across the nation. He backed his argument with the fact that Douglas supported the Dred Scott decision, which meant slaves could not gain freedom at the time and Congress could not ban slavery in

territories. Lincoln also rebutted Douglas' argument about the Declaration of Independence he made earlier during the Alton debate. The writers of the Declaration, he reasoned, really did mean that all men were created equal, but not in all cases, such as women, children, and the mentally ill. The phrase 'all men are created equal' is "true as an abstract principle in the organization of society as well in organized society, and it should be kept in view as a fundamental principle." Critics of Lincoln said that his opinion on slavery was shaky; however, the more he talked, the more strongly he felt against the institution. As a result, the arguments he made in the Alton debate grew into the political views he held during his presidency.

The location of the last debate was significant and had meaning behind it. In 1837, an abolitionist in Alton named Elijah Lovejoy was murdered by proslavery rioters while defending his anti-slavery printing press. Lovejoy died for using freedom of speech, and now two prominent politicians were using that freedom in his hometown, twenty-one years later. Additionally, Lovejoy was killed for wanting to end slavery, which was the main topic of the debate. Being acquainted with Lovejoy in the past, Lincoln was influenced by his views on slavery and recognized the gravity of the issue. Although Lincoln lost the election that followed the Alton debate, the ideas that came out of it became stronger and helped him win the presidential election two years later. These debates also made Lincoln much more popular and started to change the public's view on slavery.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton was a very important one because it was the last impression the politicians made upon the electorate. Instead of issues such as immigration, land grants, unemployment, and tariffs, Lincoln and Douglas focused on

their differing opinions on slavery. Although they made their views clearly distinct, they only underlined their differences and never made a compromise or solution. The debate did not improve the settlement of the disagreement, if not made it worse. With Douglas' states' rights and Lincoln's abolitionist view, the matter could not be more friction filled. The debate did allow Lincoln to become more confident about his views; however, and they shaped his ideas and political position on slavery by the time he ran for president. It also placed him more in the spotlight, giving him the publicity he needed for the later election. The Alton debate became a precursor of the future presidential campaigns of 1860, and an indirect cause of the Civil War. It was one of the factors that made the United States into the antislavery nation it is today. [From Richard A. Heckman, *Lincoln Vs. Douglas*. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs P, 1967; "Lecompton." *Answers.Com*. <<http://www.answers.com/topic/lecompton-constitution>> (Sept. 9, 2007); Abraham Lincoln, "Last Joint Debate, At Alton. Senator Douglas's Speech. Lincoln, Abraham. 1897. Political Debates Between Lincoln and Douglas." *Bartleby.Com*. May 2001. <<http://www.bartleby.com/251/71.html>> (Sept. 9, 2007); "Mr. Lincoln and Freedom: the Progress of Abraham Lincoln's Opposition of Slavery." *Mr. Lincoln and Freedom*. 2002. Lincoln Institute. <<http://www.mrlincolnanefreedom.org/inside.asp?ID=77&subjectID=2>> (Sept. 6, 2007); and John Splaine, *A Companion to the Lincoln Douglas Debates*.]

## **Alton Debate: the Road to Racial Equality**

Jerry Chang  
Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale  
Teacher: Nick Weshinsky

The Civil War, one of the most important events in America history, impacted the country enormously; however even before a shot was fired, the northern and southern states debated the moral justification of slavery. Illinois became a key state in deciding which party would control the U. S. Senate. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates influenced the decision. At this time, Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, fought for Illinois to become a free-state, while Stephen A. Douglas, a Democrat, initially wanted it as a slave state. This campaign was divided into seven debates. Even though Lincoln lost the senatorial election, it was clear that Lincoln benefited more from the debates. It was during the Alton debate, the final one, that Lincoln exposed views that questioned Douglas' political stance, costing Douglas the presidential election two years later.

Prior to the debates, Lincoln and Douglas had already been developing their political careers. According to W. D. Armstrong, president of the 1930 Madison County Historical Society, "In 1858 Senator Douglas reached the zenith of his wonderful career... At this time Abraham Lincoln had won little national renown, but his star was slowly rising." Douglas initially gathered support for advocating slavery and supported acts such as the Missouri Compromise which would admit more states into the nation as a slave state. In contrast, Lincoln was clearly a critic of slavery, disapproving documents like the Missouri Compromise and instead advocated decisions in admitting more states into the Union. Furthermore, Lincoln opposed the secession of states from the country as reflected in his famous quote "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Ultimately,



this showed that Lincoln advocated the United States remaining whole and completely devoid of slavery, an idea which greatly contrasts with Douglas'. Although both Lincoln and Douglas had very unique experiences, it was clear that they were both formidable speakers and fierce opponents. Because each candidate held very different opinions on slavery, their contrasting opinions created one of the most controversial debates and it became one of the most significant events in American history.

The Alton debate occurred on October 15, 1858, when the candidates had just finished speaking at Quincy, Illinois, two days earlier. According to the observers of the Alton debate, "Not only was his (Douglas') voice 'completely shattered' by the long campaign he also looked 'bloated' and 'haggard' to one observer... By contrast, Lincoln looked as fresh as if he had just entered the campaign." Nevertheless, both candidates were exhausted in some form from the previous six debates, making it easier for them to damage their own senatorial campaign. Despite the exhaustion, Lincoln managed to finish the final debate without making any serious mistakes; however, Douglas was not as successful. Coming into these debates, Douglas' campaign had been built on the belief that he was an obstinate pro-slavery candidate. However during the debates, he altered this position by saying "if this abolition doctrine... had prevailed, it would have established slavery as a permanent institution, in all the states whether they wanted it or not" suggesting that this was an example of the government "enforcing a doctrine on a majority" a pro-sovereignty stance as opposed to his initial pro-slavery campaign.

When the debate started, Douglas spoke first and recapitulated the topics discussed in the six previous debates, which insignificantly damaged Lincoln's campaign. As soon as Douglas finished speaking, Lincoln immediately began his speech by saying

“I have been somewhat... complimented by a large portion of Judge Douglas’ speech...he devotes to the controversy between himself and the present Administration.” This reveals that Lincoln had discovered several mistakes that Douglas had just made during the previous speech. Lincoln brought up the point that Douglas had initially supported the “repeal of the Missouri Compromise, it has been but a little while since he was the valiant advocate of the Missouri Compromise,” which means that prior to the debates, Douglas was a strong supporter of the existence of slavery in *all* states.

However, during this recent speech, Douglas focused more on letting the people decide the issues as opposed to his initial support for a pro slavery government. Although Douglas’s pro-sovereignty platform attracted its own supporters and would initially become a strong argument during these debates, this altercation later backfired when both Douglas’ opponents and supporters accused him of being a candidate with inconsistent beliefs. These flaws that Lincoln revealed became key factors which contributed to Douglas’ downfall. Ultimately, the Alton debate was not significant for what Douglas had mentioned in his speech; rather it is important because of the impact the questions and accusations that Lincoln presented had on future events.

Lincoln had spoken exceptionally well during the debates; however, it was Douglas who won the seat in the U. S. Senate. Today, it is still believed that despite Lincoln’s superior performance in the debates, because Douglas was better known to the public prior to the debates, he received the votes from those who remained loyal to him despite his mistakes during the debates. Despite Douglas’ victory, the Alton debate had placed Douglas in a dangerous political position with many of Lincoln’s accusations left unanswered. These unanswered questions “labeled him (Douglas) indifferent to slavery

rather than an advocate of it and the party (Democratic) split in 1860” according to Darryl Short. As several months passed between the debate and the coming presidential election, Douglas’ political position and influence over the Democratic Party had declined, while Lincoln had been requested to speak at various events that promoted his political popularity. While support for Douglas waned, it became clear, Short went on, that “Lincoln, on the other hand, only gained from the debates” and in 1860 received the Republican presidential nomination. Eventually, Lincoln became the sixteenth president of the United States.

Ultimately, the Alton debate helped shape America. Although Lincoln lost the debates, the lasting effects of the Alton debate helped contribute to his gradual rise in popularity and political power. This rising popularity enabled Lincoln to run for the 1860 presidency effectively, thus influencing the outcome of the Civil War. Lincoln’s presidency caused the Union’s victory during war, abolished slavery, which eventually led to the racial equality that exists today. Undoubtedly, without Lincoln’s participation in the Alton debate, the modern racial equality that is present today would not exist.

[From Stephen [Douglas, Speech. Lincoln-Douglas Debates. Alton Town Square, Alton, Illinois. Oct. 15, 1858. <http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm>](http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm) (Sept. 6, 2007); Harold [Holzer, \*The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the First Complete Unexpurgated Text\*; Abraham Lincoln, Speech. Lincoln-Douglas Debates. Alton Town Square, Alton, Illinois. Oct. 15, 1858. <http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm>](http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm) (Sept. 6, 2007); and Darryl [Short, "Lincoln Had Many Ties to Alton." \*Bluff City Profiles: Alton, Illinois, 1837-1987.\*](http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm)]

## **The Charleston Debate of 1858**

Eric Chen

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

Chaotic applause and wild cheering greeted Lincoln and Douglas when 12,000 to 15,000 people gathered in Charleston, Illinois to hear them speak. This was their fourth public debate. While Lincoln advocated equality for all and wanted to abolish slavery, Douglas championed the doctrine of popular sovereignty and argued that each state should determine whether or not it would permit slaves within its jurisdiction. At stake was a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Prior to this debate, the country had become deeply divided over whether or not slavery should exist in new states; most of the South championed slavery while most of the North wanted to abolish it. Both Lincoln and Douglas hoped to clarify what the founding fathers had in mind when they wrote the Constitution. Lincoln and Douglas, however, interpreted history differently.

The audience at Charleston reflected the larger division within the country over slavery. Those from southern Illinois generally shared southern values and supported slavery. Republicans from northern Illinois believed that a combination of free and slave states would divide the Union irreparably. Division between the two groups was so keen that each side even competed to have the best music, flags, and parade at the Charleston debate.

H. P. H. Bromwell opened the debate by introducing Lincoln, and O.B. Ficklin introduced Douglas. Lincoln and Douglas were as different in character, mentality, and disposition as they were in physique. Lincoln was tall and awkward, while Douglas was

short and graceful. Douglas came across as a civilized man of the world while Lincoln was the rail splitter who went to the front door in his bare feet to receive visitors. Douglas's gestures were refined; Lincoln's were ungainly. Douglas was devoid of humor; Lincoln was a fine storyteller. Douglas seldom used a simile; Lincoln constantly argued with analogy and illustration. Douglas spoke with the "impetuous rush of a whirlwind," according to a specialist in public speaking. Lincoln was also quieter, deeper, and more careful.

The historical context of the Charleston debate was significant. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had become unconstitutional, abolishing the rule that new states north of latitude 36° 30' were to exclude slavery with the exception of Missouri. In addition, the Dred Scott decision in the Supreme Court denied African Americans the rights of citizens.

Both Lincoln and Douglas wanted to win the hearts and minds of the Charleston audience. At the beginning of the debate, Lincoln claimed he did not support racial equality. This controversial statement had been prompted by Douglas' earlier accusations that Lincoln wanted to give African Americans equal rights. Lincoln proceeded to charge Douglas with conspiracy and suggested that he, Lincoln, actually held the moral high ground. In return, Douglas said Lincoln and Lyman Trumbull had divided the country and had attacked his character as well. Douglas then called Lincoln an "abolitionist" and accused him of not voting for supplies to American soldiers during the Mexican War. In his rejoinder, Lincoln brought O. B. Ficklin to the lectern so that Ficklin could confirm that Lincoln had indeed voted to send supplies to American troops. Lincoln then

explained Senator Trumbull's charge against Douglas and asked Douglas to stick strictly to relevant political issues.

Newspapers of the day presented detailed accounts of the debate. According to Republican reports, Lincoln virtually destroyed the "Little Giant" every time he spoke. According to Democratic papers, Lincoln had been crushed under Douglas' onslaught. Regardless of bias, press coverage popularized the debates, most giving Lincoln the advantage. Although Lincoln would eventually lose the Senate race to Douglas, the debates earned him the visibility he needed to win the presidential election two years later. [From Paul M. Angle and Earl S. Miers, *The Living Lincoln*; Dale Carnegie, *Public Speaking for Success*; Edward Finch, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Freeport, Illinois: Lincoln-Douglas Society, 2000 <<http://www.lincoln-douglas.org>> (Oct. 3, 2007); H. H. Houghton, *The Charleston Debate*. Galena, IL: Weekly North-Western Gazette: Tuesday, Sept. 28, 1858. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2330:1.lincoln>> (Oct. 1, 2007); Prairie Beacon News, *Lincoln and Douglas at Charleston*. Paris, IL: Prairie Beacon News, Sept. 24, 1858, <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2004:1.lincoln>> (Oct. 1, 2007); and J. G. Randall, *Lincoln the President*; Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*.]

## **The Ottawa Debate**

John D'Angelo  
University Laboratory High School, Urbana  
Teacher: Adele Suslick

The first debate between Lincoln and Douglas occurred on August 21, 1858, in Ottawa, Illinois. Both men were campaigning for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Douglas aggressively questioned Lincoln about slavery, putting Lincoln on the defensive. After the debate, a reporter from the *Chicago Press and Tribune* advised Lincoln to “Charge Chester! Charge!” during the upcoming debate at Freeport, Illinois. That is exactly what Lincoln did. He asked Douglas whether the “people of a United States territory...[could] exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution.” Douglas’ affirmative answer to this question became known as the Freeport Doctrine, and it ruined his reputation in the South and probably cost him the presidential election of 1860.

Lincoln and Douglas began their political careers in the Illinois State Legislature. Douglas went on to become a U.S. Senator, while Lincoln retired temporarily from political life in 1849 after serving in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1854, Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that had restricted slavery to the South by forbidding its expansion into western territories. The Kansas-Nebraska Act made it possible for the citizens of a territory to decide to form a slave state. Lincoln’s strong disagreement with the Kansas-Nebraska Act brought him back into politics, saying “I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again.”

Lincoln and Douglas held starkly contrasting ideas on slavery. Lincoln was always against slavery although he thought that the constitutional rights of slaveholders

should be respected. In the Ottawa debate, Lincoln read from an 1854 speech he had delivered in Peoria. He said that “If all earthly power were given to me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution.” He felt strongly, however, that slavery should not be allowed to expand. Douglas, on the other hand, believed that states have the right to choose between being slave or free, although he was not actually proslavery.

In his opening speech at Ottawa, Douglas supported popular sovereignty, the notion that states have the right to decide on their own about things such as the answer to the slavery question. Douglas then listed the abolitionist resolutions of the Republican Party and interrogated Lincoln with a long list of questions about his alleged endorsement of them. Lincoln, however, was only moderately antislavery, and Douglas’ source, a newspaper clipping about Lincoln’s endorsement of the Republican platform, was later found to be incorrect. Douglas went on to criticize Lincoln’s House Divided speech, claiming that the Founding Fathers knew what they were doing and that “Mr. Lincoln and the Republican party set themselves up as wiser than these men who made this Government, which has flourished for seventy years under the principle of popular sovereignty, recognizing the right of each state to do as it pleased.” Douglas then asked the audience to consider the consequences of allowing freed slaves to become citizens. Douglas also criticized Lincoln’s opposition to the Supreme Court decision *Dred Scott v. Sanford*.

In his rebuttal, Lincoln seemed surprised by Douglas’ attack. Although he denied involvement in the Republican platform, he did not otherwise directly answer Douglas’ questions. Rather than stating his position on slavery, he chose to read a long passage from his Peoria speech. In it, he said that “There is no reason in the world why the Negro



is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Lincoln then denounced popular sovereignty and expressed his disapproval of the Dred Scott decision. He pointed out that the next Supreme Court decision on slavery could allow free states the right to become slave states, and that was something Lincoln dreaded.

Lincoln and Douglas, despite these differences, both believed strongly in the importance of the Union. In his House Divided speech, Lincoln said that “I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.” Douglas ended his comments in the Ottawa debate by saying that “This new doctrine preached by Mr. Lincoln and his party will dissolve the union if it succeeds.” In other words, Douglas believed that Lincoln’s position on slavery would lead to war between the North and South. In addition, both men believed that the issue of slavery would be the United State’s downfall. It is not surprising, then, that during the Civil War Douglas adamantly supported President Lincoln as he attempted to save the Union. In fact, the day after hearing that Fort Sumter had been attacked, Lincoln and Douglas met to discuss how to handle the war.

Shortly after the Ottawa debate, Lincoln said “The fire flew some, and I am glad to know I am yet alive.” One of his friends advised him to “hold Dug [Douglas] up as a traitor and conspirator, a pro-slavery bamboozling demagogue.” Lincoln came back fighting in the next debate. He answered all of Douglas’ questions and presented Douglas with four new questions, one of which resulted in the Freeport Doctrine. It was a question which may have earned Lincoln the presidency. Douglas’ reputation was damaged as a result, especially in the South, while Lincoln became nationally recognized

because of the seven debates he had with Douglas. [From David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*; “First Debate with Stephen A. Douglas,” Lincoln Home. <<http://www.nps.gov//debate1.htm>> (Sept. 9, 2007); Philip Van Doren Stern, ed. *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*; and Paul Simon, *Lincoln’s Preparation for Greatness*.]

## **The Turning Point**

Michael Dennis  
Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale  
Teacher: Nick Weshinsky

The lives and careers of two opponents can be considerably different. This was true for Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Abraham Lincoln started off as a lawyer and then moved towards a political career. He failed at his first attempt at political office by losing a campaign for Illinois General Assembly. Then, two years later, he won the election for state legislature. Stephen A. Douglas was born in the state of Vermont. He settled in Jacksonville, Illinois, at the age of 20. There he was a teacher and studied law. By 1842, he was a leader of the Democratic Party. Lincoln's and Douglas' paths first crossed in 1854 because of the Kansas-Nebraska Act which was proposed by Douglas and Lincoln came back to politics to fight the act. Lincoln was then instrumental in creating the Republican Party. Then in 1858, Lincoln wanted Douglas' Senate seat pitting Lincoln as an up-and-coming politician for the Republican Party against Douglas as the incumbent Democratic Senator. This led to the famous Lincoln-Douglas Debates. At the fifth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, both Lincoln and Douglas were affected by this debate. They both began to take on a different tone and, as for Lincoln, it meant the stroke he needed to get in line for the presidency.

The Galesburg debate was hotly contested between the "Little Giant" and Abraham Lincoln. After Galesburg, both "debaters took on a new tone, with candidates addressing matters of principle." Douglas became even fiercer as a debater while Lincoln continued with his well-known calm, cool approach. Despite his approach, Lincoln's speeches became more vigorous in their meaning. Before Galesburg, both Lincoln and

Douglas gave arguments that were not offensive to the other's supporters, but still said enough to try and win their vote, all the while still meaning something to their own supporters. Beginning with Galesburg and continuing on to Quincy and Alton, they started to take more of a stance on issues and "moral questions were given prolonged and revealing attention," according to one historian. Their speeches revealed that which they actually felt and which they believed. It was near the end of their campaigns and both needed to get as many votes and support as possible. They had to say and show what they truly believed in. According to Douglas, however, Lincoln "in one part of the State he stood up for Negro equality, and in another part for political effect, discarded the doctrine and declared that there always must be a superior and inferior race." Previous to the Galesburg debate, they said what was expected to be said depending on the part of the state they were in. The Galesburg debate was the turning point in terms of what they were saying and they got much more personal and revealed their true beliefs. Unfortunately for Douglas, he started saying what he truly believed in an abolitionist town that wholeheartedly supported Lincoln. Eyewitness accounts tell that "it was a losing fight there for him in that Abolition town and he knew, he felt it." Douglas tried hard to prove to the pro-Lincoln crowd that he deserved their vote.

Douglas was a Democrat and he supported slavery, even though, he was not as vigorous in fighting to keep slavery as much as the other Democratic leaders would have liked him to be. The immediate question in the Galesburg debate and in the parties "was whether or not slavery should be allowed in the Kansas frontier." He did not sign onto a proslavery amendment for Kansas. He believed in popular sovereignty, which is the view that each state should be able to choose if it wants to have slavery. This view made the

Democratic leaders angry, so Douglas spent a lot of time defending himself on that issue. Nonetheless, he still believed that African Americans should never become citizens and never get equal rights. Lincoln disagreed with and found faults in what Douglas and the Democratic Party were saying about African Americans. Douglas tried to make Lincoln out to be a wholehearted abolitionist, which he was, to try and get the votes of those Southerners that supported slavery. However, Lincoln was careful not to come out and say he was an abolitionist, and that he supported full rights and equality for African Americans. He did speak “more strongly about the moral evil of slavery than he had in earlier debates.” However, he did state that the Declaration of Independence ensured certain freedoms for everyone. All the while, Lincoln kept his composure and planned out his arguments. They were “finely woven arguments, consistent, continuous, logical, irresistible in its force,” according to Emanuel Hertz. On the other hand, Douglas continued to fight with the same words and phrases that he used in all of the previous debates and was overly vigorous in his attacks. It was all he could do to survive the Galesburg debate.

After the Galesburg debate, Lincoln and Douglas battled in words twice more, at Alton and Quincy. Once all the debates were over, the Illinois legislature was called and voted on who they wanted to represent Illinois as its senator. They returned Douglas to his position even though it was by a much smaller margin than was thought he might get before the debates. Douglas may have won that battle, but Lincoln won the war between the two because in 1860 Lincoln won the presidential race against Douglas. It was the Galesburg debate “where Lincoln began his career of leadership triumphant,” wrote Hertz. Lincoln started to say what he wanted and needed to say instead of saying what

sounded the best and offended the least number of people. Lincoln, it seemed, realized his potential and that he had to take a stand on some things to get places in politics. The Galesburg debate was the place where Lincoln took a stand against slavery and said what needed to be said to help move a nation against slavery. [From "Fifth Debate."

<<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate5.htm>> (Sept. 27, 2007); Emanuel Hertz, *Abraham Lincoln At the Climax of the Great Lincoln-Douglas Joint Debate in Galesburg, Illinois*; Harold Holzer, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; R. D. Monroe, "Lincoln's Biography." 2000. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/biography7.html>> (Sept. 6, 2007); Hermann R. Muelder, *Why Galesburg and Knox College Were on Lincoln's Side*; and *The Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Galesburg, Illinois, October 7th, 1858*. As Recalled by E. S. Willcox.]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton**

Daniel Eller  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

In the late 1840s, Abraham Lincoln was a congressman in the House of Representatives. He represented his party, the Whigs, in Washington, D. C. Lincoln had high hopes for his political career. However, things did not turn out the way he expected and he left Washington after one term. He went back to practicing law in Illinois and felt like his political career was dead.

In 1854, a Democratic Senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, managed to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act through Congress. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820. This meant that slavery might be allowed in territories where it had been prohibited before. Lincoln was appalled when he heard about this and decided he had to do something. He began giving speeches, arguing against Douglas' belief that the territories themselves should decide whether or not they wanted slavery. Lincoln believed that slavery was morally wrong and no man should own another. Although Lincoln did not win a seat in the Senate then, he was nominated by his new party, the Republicans, to run against Stephen A. Douglas in 1858.

It was not an easy race. Lincoln had problems with popularity, so he decided to follow Douglas around the state of Illinois. Douglas spoke to the crowds and afterwards, Lincoln responded to the speech with his own opinions. This strategy was fine, but Lincoln realized he did not get as many people to listen to him as did Douglas. Newspapers made fun of Lincoln, writing that he could not get an audience. Lincoln asked the advice of Norman Judd and Judd helped him come up with a plan: to be on the

same stage with Douglas and have joint discussions and arguments. This is how the most famous political debates began.

There were seven debates in all. They began in Ottawa, Illinois, and ended on October 15, 1858, in Alton, Illinois. The seventh, and last debate, became known as the turning point in Lincoln's belief that there was no middle ground for slavery.

The debates were serious discussions for the two candidates, but they were also used as entertainment for the people in the town. Parades were held, and people brought food and socialized before the debates began. The Alton debate was expected to attract a large audience. Steamboats and railroads offered special discounts from St. Louis to Alton. Lincoln's wife, Mary, and his son, Robert were present that day. The crowd was actually smaller than anticipated, but no one was disappointed. Lincoln and Douglas arrived in Alton together and the debate began at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Douglas appeared tired, and his voice was strained from all the weeks of speeches. Abraham Lincoln looked ready to debate. Douglas began the debate by discussing Lincoln's belief that the country would not stand being made into "slave states" and "free states." Douglas believed that each state should get to choose whether or not they were allowed to own slaves. He called this the "right of self-government" and felt that it was the basis for the country's government. He believed that each state should make up its own mind and other states should not interfere with those decisions. Douglas also reminded the audience that the Constitution did not prohibit slavery.

Lincoln knew that he was speaking in a state which had many supportive of slavery. He believed that slavery was morally wrong and that there was no middle ground in this issue. He also believed that slavery was the biggest issue with the



American people and that there would not be an easy compromise. Lincoln showed himself to be a true leader in this debate. He quoted the Declaration of Independence as proof that “all men are created equal” and that the creators of the Declaration of Independence did not mean that African Americans were not included in this document. Lincoln did not win the November 2 election and Douglas returned to the Senate.

There were many explanations about why Lincoln lost and Douglas won, but no one will ever know for sure. The most important thing to remember about this debate was that Abraham Lincoln stood before an audience who did not agree with his ideas and refused to back down on his beliefs that “all men are created equal.” [From Harold Holzer, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; Timothy Good, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates and the Making of a President*; Harry E. Pratt, *The Great Debates*. “Illinois Blue Book,” 1953-1954; and David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery*.]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Charleston**

Youyang Gu

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

It was a warm day, and as Abraham Lincoln stepped onto the podium at 2:45, immense applause broke out. When Lincoln began his speech, his booming voice silenced the large crowd. The day was September 18, 1858, and more than 12,000 people had come to the Coles County fairgrounds in Charleston, Illinois, to hear the debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas as they vied for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Lincoln knew this area well because his father and his stepmother had settled here. This was the fourth of seven debates held in Illinois. While Douglas was famous across the nation, Lincoln was barely known. These seven debates had a profound effect because they helped Lincoln become President of the United States and ultimately ended slavery in the nation.

Slavery was extremely controversial during the early nineteenth century. After America had won a vast amount of land during the Mexican War of 1848, disputes arose over whether a territory should be slave or free. In 1854, Douglas championed popular sovereignty in the Kansas-Nebraska Act, thereby allowing settlers of a newly-formed state to determine if slavery would exist. This resulted in more dispute and the formation of the Republican Party.

In general, Democrats considered slaves property and wanted slavery to remain legal. Douglas, a Democrat, claimed that he did not care whether slavery existed or not. Republicans, on the other hand, believed that slavery violated basic human rights and insisted that everyone has “the right to put into his mouth the bread that his own hands have earned.”

In 1858, Lincoln challenged Douglas to seven debates. Douglas initially declined because he feared the debates would give Lincoln too much attention, but he finally accepted after newspapers called him a coward. Douglas chose the sites of the seven debates and limited each debate to three hours. On September 17, 1858, the candidates arrived in Mattoon by train and traveled to Charleston the next morning.

Flags, banners, and bunting decorated the streets of Charleston. Thirty-two couples on horseback accompanied Douglas as he marched towards Charleston, while Lincoln's entourage featured a float with thirty-two ladies, representing the thirty-two states of the Union. Large crowds stretching over a mile followed their favorite candidate.

The debaters targeted two audiences: those who cared about the speakers' showmanship and charisma, and those who cared more about future plans for the nation. Lincoln began his speech by clarifying his position on slavery, stating that he did not believe in total equality. Later on, Lincoln attacked Douglas' idea of popular sovereignty, emphasizing that Douglas denied Kansas the opportunity to put popular sovereignty to use in 1856. Lincoln further accused Douglas of inconsistency by not promoting the Lecompton Constitution that would have allowed Kansas to set up a constitutional convention and a vote on slavery. Lincoln finished his hour claiming that Douglas' many changes to the Toombs Bill prevented a popular election in Kansas.

Douglas spent most of his speech denying Lincoln's accusations and then attacking him, stating that Lincoln was trying to unite the Whigs and the Republicans and that Lincoln had failed to support the United States during the Mexican War. Douglas also challenged Lincoln's notion of African American's equality, which Lincoln then

defended in his thirty-minute rejoinder. Lincoln also argued that Douglas' claims lacked evidence, which resulted in laughter and applause from the audience. However, Douglas' accusation that Lincoln did not vote to send supplies to American soldiers during the Mexican War made Lincoln lose his temper. In a show of physical strength, he hauled Orlando B. Ficklin, a Democratic congressman, to the podium and asked Ficklin to confirm that Lincoln had voted for necessary military supplies. Amidst loud cheers, Ficklin testified that Lincoln did indeed do so, proving Douglas' accusations false. Lincoln then concluded his speech, and the audience cheered for both candidates.

Overall, Douglas spent more time, money, and energy trying to win the election. He traveled over 5,000 miles and spent an estimated \$50,000 campaigning, while Lincoln only spent \$1,000. On November 2, 1858, people voted. Even though the Republicans received more votes (125,430 to 121,609), the legislature favored Douglas 54 to 46. In Coles County, Lincoln edged Douglas by less than five percent.

Despite his loss, Lincoln soon became nationally famous. Conversely, Southern Democrats never forgave Douglas for saying that slavery could be banned by a territorial government. In 1860, Lincoln won the presidential election by gaining the votes of 1,865,000 Americans, while only 1,375,000 favored Douglas.

In conclusion, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates changed how politicians campaign. Today presidential debates occur frequently during the course of an election campaign, and their format closely resembles the one established by Lincoln and Douglas 150 years ago. The 1858 debates ultimately gained Abraham Lincoln the recognition he needed to become president, and that helped end slavery. [From Frank L. Dennis, *The Lincoln-*

*Douglas Debates*; Richard Allen Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas*; Brendan January, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* and Saul Sigelschiffer, *The American Conscience*.]

## **The Great Debate at Ottawa**

Kelly L. Halpin  
Washington Gifted School, Peoria  
Teacher: Mindy Juriga and Janelle Dies

In the past, elections have always been an immense part of everyday life. In 1858, elections were important both to the state, and to the candidates, fueling their desire to be victorious. In 1858, two candidates decided on seven debates for a U. S. Senate seat, all over Illinois. These two candidates were Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, two people from deep inside the political circle. Their debates decided who the people chose to represent their state. Furthermore, the issues that they raised were controversial, to say the least. From slavery to hidden plots to shame some and benefit others, the debates raised points that many never expected to hear. Overall, the state was greatly affected as opinions on slavery changed and people began to change their minds about many other issues. As a result of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Ottawa, many racial issues facing Illinois were raised, and people's view on slavery changed, which helped lay the foundation for the Civil War.

These debates had a profound effect on life as it is today, but there was a considerable background that fueled these debates. To begin, both of these men had spent most of their lives in Illinois to help improve the state. Also, the two candidates had to arrange for travel. In the beginning, Lincoln suggested that the duo travel together for 100 days, debating all over the state. But Douglas objected, declaring that the scheme would be too trying. In the end, they decided instead on seven debates, taking place in seven of the nine congressional districts throughout the state. Finally, Lincoln was

somewhat unsure of the topic of slavery given the fact that it was not something he had publicly debated before.

Throughout the campaigns and the debates, the press played a large part by being very public about the candidates and their lives. Therefore, the publicity of the campaign played a large part in the final outcome. First, the support for the candidates from many people came from articles put into newspapers and other places. Douglas was openly supported by the Republicans. Furthermore, the New York *Tribune* urged the Illinois Republicans to side with Douglas over the debate, something that they were already doing, unbeknownst to the newspaper at the time of publication. Additionally, Lincoln was endorsed by ninety-five state officials. Issues that they raised that contributed to the overall publicity were the political rights and responsibilities they assumed. One issue was raised by Lincoln, stating that slavery clearly violated the Declaration of Independence.

Easily one of the most important aspects, and the most obvious would have to be politics. Politics shaped the way Illinois functioned as a state, and they shaped the final outcome of the debate. The country's instability, the timing, the context of the debate, and the issue of slavery all played a major part in the final outcome. Within the debate, Douglas believed that the issue of slavery, and the decisions with it, should stay at a local level. The points should be decided by the local government; the end result should affect the wishes of the people, he believed. It has also been said to have had the greatest impact of all the debates that had ever taken place in Illinois.

As it was previously stated, the first of the seven debates took place in Ottawa on August 21, 1858. It began with Douglas delivering a one-hour long opening speech,

where he stated the points in which he believed. After Douglas' speech, Lincoln gave his opening speech, and then Douglas delivered his rebuttal, which led into half hour answers to finish out the debate. Some of the points raised had great impacts. At one point during the debate, Douglas asked Lincoln about whether or not Lincoln agreed on slavery's abolition in certain areas. Lincoln agreed, claiming that slavery violated the Declaration of Independence. When it was Douglas' turn to debate, he raised no new points after Lincoln's speech, leading some to doubt him.

With every excellent debate, there will always come some controversy, and this debate was no exception. First, the current population of Illinois brought great controversy. There were rifts created with other states, and some were bold enough to say that Illinois was at war with the surrounding states. Also, Lincoln had an associate in law named Trumbull. In the debate, Douglas claimed that Lincoln and Trumbull had a secret plot to shame Illinois as a whole by twisting the country's debt. Not only would the state be shamed, but the two men would supposedly get into Congress. There was never any concrete proof of any plan like this, and Lincoln vehemently denied that any of Douglas' words were true.

As a result of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Ottawa, many racial issues facing Illinois were raised, and people's view on slavery changed, which laid the foundation for the Civil War. Both Douglas and Lincoln worked hard throughout the entire debate to make their points known, influencing the minds of Illinois residents as they went. The issues they raised are still affecting Illinois and the surrounding states today, which is something both candidates were hoping to achieve. From stirring the political pot to smashing the basic fundamentals of slavery that had entranced the state



for so long, they changed the state for the better. They shaped how Illinois functions today, and how slavery is viewed. Elections today are high fueled, high intensity affairs, something that Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln could both relate to in their battle for power. [From George R. Farnum and Harry F. Lake, *The Great Debate*; Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, "Lincoln-Douglas Debates," *The Reader's Companion to American History* Dec. 1, 1991; William E. Foote, "The Ottawa Debate." *The Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 24, 1858; Blaine Brooks Gernon, *Lincoln in the Political Circus*; Edith Mavis and Ted Mavis, "Touring Illinois: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates," *Illinois Magazine* Aug./Sep. 1978; Ralph G. Newman, *Lincoln for the Ages*; Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*; and Don C. Seitz, *Lincoln the Politician*.]

## **Battling at Galesburg: A New Wind Blows**

Amanda Hamrick  
Hiawatha Junior High School, Kirkland  
Teacher: Todd Johnson

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” These are but a few of Lincoln’s immortal words. His words will ring in our ears forever, constantly reminding us of his wisdom. These words reflect his fear that slavery, if it continued to divide the nation, would destroy it. In his own unique style, he shared this view as well as many others in his great senate debates with Stephen A. Douglas. These debates changed history. These debates brought into view a great man who soon became one of our nation’s greatest leaders.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates took place in 1858. This was a crucial time for the United States of America. The Dred Scott decision had been decided by the U. S. Supreme Court. The Kansas-Nebraska Act had been enacted. Many people argued about the rights and wrongs of slavery. Both men were battling for the Illinois senatorial seat. Stephen A. Douglas was the democratic candidate. He had been in the Senate since his election in 1847. Abraham Lincoln was less known and the Republican candidate. Then, Galesburg came along. Could Lincoln put a stop to Douglas’ “winning streak”?

Each man had his past. Douglas’s accomplishments included that of helping enact the Compromise of 1850 and playing a huge role in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Douglas even had a place on the Senate committee on territories. You hardly ever heard a bad word about him pass someone’s lips.

Abraham Lincoln was from Springfield, Illinois. He was a successful lawyer. He was a state politician. He had been driven out of Congress for questioning the government during the Mexican War, yet not many people knew of him.

On Thursday, October 7, 1858, the Galesburg debate took place. Out of all the debate sites, it is the only location that still exists for us to see. The weather was very cruel. It was fall and it had poured rain the night before. The wind blew hard adding to the freezing temperature, chilling the bones of anyone that wandered outdoors. It was so windy they had to move the stand to the east side of the building. Legend says that the candidates had to climb through windows on the main floor of the college just to get to the platform. It is said that Lincoln replied to the shortcut with “Well, at last I have gone through college.”

Douglas engaged Lincoln’s opinion that the Declaration of Independence declares all men, including the black race, equal. He argued that Thomas Jefferson, the writer of the Declaration of Independence, had many slaves until he died. When the Declaration of Independence was created, every one of the thirteen colonies was a slaveholding colony. Each man that signed the document did not think the black race was equal for each man owned slaves and continued to hold them after the signing. Douglas asked

Now, do you believe—are you willing to have it said—that every man who signed the Declaration of Independence declared his negro his equal, and he was hypocrite enough to continue to hold him as a slave, in violation of what he believed to be divine law?

Douglas finished his speech by informing the audience that even though under the Constitution a black man cannot become a citizen and should not become a citizen, it does not mean he should be a slave. It is up to the individual states to decide for themselves the extent of the African American’s privileges.

Lincoln began his speech with the much-argued point that the black man was included in the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln said:

The entire record of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to within three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation, from one single man, that the Negro was not included in the Declaration of Independence.

Lincoln ended his speech. In the short amount of time left, could Douglas get the audience to see his way?

Douglas' reaccused Lincoln of having contrasting speeches. Douglas' final words included those of going against the Supreme Court might cause a mob action. He stepped back. The crowd bustled to the warmth of their homes. The battle was over. Who would be seen as victorious?

Lincoln and Douglas were not the only ones to disagree. The newspapers argued about the outcome of the Galesburg debate. The Republican press swore it was definitely a Lincoln victory. The *Times*, a Democratic paper, said Douglas had done very well, and the Republicans were just trying to keep Lincoln going.

One newspaper admitted that it was so windy that it was sometimes hard to hear the speakers. A Republican paper said Douglas tried to keep the crowd's attention with acts of violence and temper. More than one pro-Lincoln paper described Douglas with white foam over his lips.

Not only did the newspapers argue about who did the best, but they argued about conflicting script. When Lincoln was represented badly in the *Times*, the *Press and Tribune*, a Republican paper, accused Douglas of paying the *Times* to make Lincoln look indecent and nasty. If you look closely at both transcripts, the only thing wrong was both

papers missed a few sentences and the *Times* did not record the disturbances from the crowd.

Why do we look at these debates with such importance? Why do schools around the country study them? Lincoln came into these debates the lesser known man. He lost the senate race, but it led him on his way to the presidency. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates also changed debating forever. These debates are well known for their ability to bring together people and discuss issues of that time respectively. One of the most important reasons that these debates matter is that it changed the population's opinion on slavery, black's rights, and states' rights. Without these debates, our country would not stand as it stands today. [From Harold Holzer, (2004). *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; Abraham Lincoln and Stephan Douglas, (1913). *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; *Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* at: <[www.illinoiscivilwar.org](http://www.illinoiscivilwar.org)> (Sept. 28, 2007); and David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery*.]

## **The Debate That Started it All**

Amanda Hayward  
Oregon High School, Oregon  
Teacher: Sara Werckle

Debates are one of the ways that countries are transformed and ideas are conveyed.

History encompasses many debates. One type of debate is a presidential debate. During 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas debated various topics. On August 21 in Ottawa, Illinois, Lincoln's and Douglas' debate revolved around slavery, and showed that Lincoln wanted to abolish slavery whereas Douglas wanted to keep slavery.

Differences about slavery got the Civil War started.

First, the debate was ultimately about slavery and involved a discussion about the Dred Scott case, the Nebraska Bill, and the existence of the United States as half free and half masters with slaves. The Dred Scott Case was about Dred Scott, a black slave who moved with his master to a free state and married. Then, his master died. Dred Scott attempted to buy his own freedom, but the wife of his former master did not allow it, and the court ruled that he was not a citizen; hence the laws of the state did not apply to him. Next, the Kansas-Nebraska Act that Douglas helped write divided Kansas into the Kansas Territory and the Nebraska Territory. The bill also stated that the occupants of those territories would determine whether they wanted slavery or not. Finally, about half of the states in the United States allowed slavery, and the other half did not. This showed inconsistency in laws from state to state and a further separation between states. Also, Lincoln had said in June that, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." He emphasized that the country needs to be consistent on important laws.

In the debate, Lincoln opposed slavery and Douglas was ready to tolerate it.

Lincoln opposed the ruling of the Dred Scott Case because the verdict showed that blacks did not have the same rights as whites and that Judge Taney did not fully assess the claims from Dred Scott. Douglas stated that he was “opposed to negro citizenship in any and every form.” Secondly, Lincoln thought that taking slaves from Africa, which was outlawed, and then bringing them into Kansas was the same crime, so he believed that the new states should not have slavery. However, Douglas believed that it was right for the states to choose whether they wanted to have slavery or not. Thirdly, Lincoln did not like the idea of slavery, but he was not against the states that already had slavery or the idea that whites were superior. Douglas, agreeing with Lincoln, states that great men before their time made the states so that some were slave states and some were free states.

Lastly, the ideas about slavery eventually led to the Civil War, which was fueled by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Lincoln's election as president, and economic inequality between the North and South. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* one figure stated, “We don't own your laws; we don't own your country; we stand here as free, under God's sky, as you are; and, by the great God that made us, we'll fight for our liberty till we die.” This statement proves that the African Americans were not being treated the same as white slave owners, which was important for the start of the Civil War. The South also did not like it that Abraham Lincoln did not approve of slavery yet was elected president. Since the South thought that Lincoln would outlaw slavery, they seceded. Lastly, the South did not control foreign trade or have banks like the North. Even though the North was stronger economically than the South, the two sections depended upon each other because of trade. The South only saw that the North was reaping all of the benefits, and that fact contributed to the friction between the South and North that started the Civil War.

The debate in Ottawa, Illinois was a success because it was the first debate between Lincoln and Douglas. This particular debate showed how the two men saw slavery extremely differently, proved that Lincoln wanted to end slavery and Douglas was willing to keep the tradition, and how the basis of the Civil War, slavery, was finally debated in public. This debate also displayed the differences between Lincoln's and Douglas' physical stature and the way they conducted themselves. Douglas was short, fiery, and self-confident, whereas Lincoln was tall, humorous, humble, and uncertain. All of those differences put together indicated clearly what each man was like. People could vote with accuracy, therefore. [From *First Debate With Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois*. <<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate1.htm>> (Oct. 14, 2007); Jennifer Erbach, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*. <[http://americanhistory.about.com/od/civilwarmenu/a/cause\\_civil\\_war.htm](http://americanhistory.about.com/od/civilwarmenu/a/cause_civil_war.htm)> (Oct. 18, 2007); J. G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and Paul Wellman, *The House Divides*.]



## **The Second of The Lincoln-Douglas Debates**

Michaela McQuiggan  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

The people came by the thousands from all directions in oxcarts, buggies, by boat and trains, and on foot. They came with great excitement and interest, marching to the band music. What caused this party atmosphere? It was the day of the great second debate between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. They were each running for the office of the United States Senate from Illinois. It was August 27, 1858, and the location for this debate was a hundred miles northwest of Chicago in the town of Freeport.

Douglas, the incumbent, was the more famous of the two candidates, but after this second debate Lincoln became a household name over night. Douglas was a strong opponent, had nothing to gain from the debates, but in order to save face, agreed to Abraham Lincoln's challenge to debate him. 'Their one major difference was the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of slavery; a very moral controversy,' wrote historian Frank Dennis. Negro slavery had existed for 250 years in America, mainly in the South. The United States was divided on this issue. Earlier in 1858, Lincoln, as the leader of the Republican Party, had given his famous speech about a "house divided against itself cannot stand." He said that he 'did not believe the Union would dissolve, but it would cease to be divided.'

Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas were as different as night and day in appearance. Douglas, known as the 'Little Giant,' was only 5'4" and Lincoln a good twelve inches taller. Douglas arrived at each debate in his private railroad car with his fashionable and social second wife, Adele. He was wealthy and dressed to perfection and

confidence and had an eloquent and aggressive manner. Accompanying him was a flatbed railroad car with a shiny, brass cannon attended by soldiers who fired the cannon whenever they arrived in a new town. Lincoln had to pay for a seat on a passenger train car like other people and so by the time he arrived, he was covered with dust. Lincoln wore a dusty black coat with sleeves too short, a wrinkled shirt and tie that never seemed to be straight. He carried an old gray shawl and bulging umbrella. His wife mostly had to stay at home to take care of their sons and make ends meet while Lincoln campaigned.

It looked like Douglas had won the first debate of seven in Ottawa. He had made many charges about Lincoln's views making him look like a total abolitionist, whereas he actually was a moderate in his views. He was practical about the long-standing issue of slavery but also did not want to extend it.

Lincoln, on that cool, drizzly day opened the second debate. He went through each question from the first debate that Douglas had charged against him. Often with great humor at his opponent's expense, Abe defended himself against the false comments. From these responses it was clear what Lincoln's stand was concerning slavery, states' rights, and constitutions for entering the Union. Then, Lincoln posed four questions to Douglas; three of these held little relevance but his second question and Douglas' response to this question actually ended up dividing the Democratic Party. They ended any hopes for Douglas being nominated for President in 1860.

This second question was "Can the people of a United States territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the U. S., exclude slavery from the limits prior to the formation of a state constitution?" Lincoln was advised not to ask this particular question as it would actually be to Douglas' advantage in winning the Senate

race. (Douglas did win because of the way the districts were mapped out.) Douglas' response, which became known as the 'Freeport Doctrine,' was "that any territory that wanted to eliminate slavery could do so by passing laws 'unfriendly' to that institution." This brought an excited response from the Northerners but angered the Southern Democrats. Newspaper readers all over the country were able to follow the debates because newspaper reporters recorded exactly what was said. Newspapers from all over the nation covered the debates.

Of all the debates it appears that this second one was the most important for it actually made a way for the Republicans, a party untroubled by divisions, to win the presidential election of 1860 and make Abraham Lincoln the sixteenth president. Because of the debates of 1858 the issue of slavery came before the American people in a way that they could not avoid the fact that they had to make a decision. It was time to agree with our Constitution or remain blind to the claim that "all men are created equal."

[From Paul M. Angle, *Created Equal?*; \_\_\_\_\_, *The Lincoln Reader*; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*; Janet and Geoff Benge, *Abraham Lincoln a New Birth of Freedom*; Frank L. Dennis, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; Sterling North, *Abe Lincoln, Log Cabin to White House*; and J. G. Randall, *Mr. Lincoln*.]

## **Galesburg Senatorial Debate, 1858**

Katy Metcalf  
University Laboratory High School, Urbana  
Teacher: Adele Suslick

On October 7, 1858, in Galesburg, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas engaged in one of the greatest debates of all time. The battle was for the votes of Knox County for a U. S. Senate seat, which in the end threw its support to Lincoln. In this great clash, both men discussed controversial issues for three hours, but attention always returned to the topic of slavery. Douglas, the expansionist, was intent on building the nation at any cost. Lincoln, a member of the newly formed Republican Party, held strong abolitionist views. These men, two of the most influential figures in American history, radically changed the way people understood major issues of the day.

Galesburg, the seat of Knox County, was a comparatively small town in 1858. On that October morning, the air was festive and the streets crowded with people. Most cheered for Lincoln. Douglas rode to town on the Burlington train, accompanied by a motley assortment of Lincoln and Douglas supporters. Lincoln arrived with the Knoxville delegation and was met by fellow Republicans as well as the military, creating a procession so long that “mammoth would not describe it. It was like one of Cobb’s tales, of monstrous length and *to be continued*.” This was the report of the *Galesburg Semi-Weekly Democrat*. At two o’clock sharp, both men arrived at the platform in four-horse carriages, accompanied by the military and crowds of their own supporters. The debate began at 2:30.

Douglas, who had been allotted one half-hour for his arguments spoke first. He stated his support for both the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the compromise measures of

1850. He also explained that he fought against the Lecompton Constitution, one of four proposals for admitting Kansas into the Union. The Lecompton Constitution would welcome Kansas as a slaveholding state, although voters would have the right to choose whether more slaves would be allowed. To this, Lincoln had no reply. Presumably, he agreed with both the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Compromise of 1850. Abandoning rational argument for personal attack, Douglas then accused Lincoln of changing both policy and philosophy in different parts of the state, playing abolitionist in the north and “old-line Whig” in the south. Lincoln countered by saying that his argument remained exactly the same in Chicago as in Jonesboro. Douglas then responded that even if Lincoln *did* have a consistent argument, it still must be untrue. Lincoln replied by saying “The only evidence he [Douglas] has of their [Lincoln’s ideas] being wrong is in the fact that there are people who won’t allow us to preach them. I ask again, is that any way to test the soundness of a doctrine?”

Moving past personal attack, Lincoln refuted Douglas’ arguments. Lincoln described himself as someone who wished to see slavery abolished. Though he conceded that the black man was “inferior” intellectually to whites, Lincoln still believed that all men should be treated equally. He concluded his presentation by stating that race should have no affect on a man’s rights, that no one had ever said, when writing the Constitution, that the black man was not included in it. “And I will remind Judge Douglas and this audience that while Mr. Jefferson was the owner of slaves, as undoubtedly he was, in speaking upon this very subject, he used the strong language that ‘he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just.’” Lincoln clearly identified with the abolitionist movement. Though it was more popular in the northernmost section of the

state, most of the south favored Douglas' expansionist policy. Because Illinois was bordered by two slave states, albeit not ones that would secede in the Civil War, almost any point south of Charleston was sympathetic to the Confederacy or pro-slavery, and this helped Douglas win the debates as a whole.

To conclude, the debate at Galesburg clarified the speakers' views on black rights. Though Douglas provided valid arguments, most of the Galesburg area was predisposed toward Lincoln and the abolitionist movement. Even so, Douglas' words were transcribed, read in other parts of the state, and persuaded other people. Thus, despite Lincoln winning the Galesburg debate, Douglas won the Senate seat. Both Lincoln and Douglas changed the way many people viewed major issues, and they helped bring the country to where it is today, slave-free and with equal rights for all people. [From Edward Finch, "Lincoln-Douglas Debates." *Lincoln-Douglas Society*. 200.

<<http://www.lincoln-douglas.org/>> (Oct. 8, 2007); William E. Foote, "The Galesburg Debate." *Daily Pantagraph* [Bloomington, IL] 13 Oct. 1858. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2284:1.lincoln>> (Oct. 8, 2007); "Galesburg Debate. Great Outpouring of the People! 20,000 Persons Present!" *Galesburg Semi-Weekly Democrat* 9 Oct. 1858. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2003:1.lincoln>> (Oct. 8, 2007); J. Harding, "Debate at Galesburg." *Prairie Beacon News* 22 Oct. 1858. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2000:1.lincoln>> (Oct. 8, 2007); and Abraham Lincoln, and Stephen Douglas. "Fifth Debate." *Lincoln Home National Historic Site*. National Park Service. <<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate5.htm>> (Oct. 8, 2007).]

## **A Comparison and Contrast of the Speaking Styles of Lincoln and Douglas**

Allen Miller

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

Few historical rivalries are more dramatic than that between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Aside from their physical differences, the two men were quite similar. Both were migrants to Illinois, both were self-made men, and both agreed on almost all of the issues of the day, except for slavery. Their physical differences, however, were obvious. Lincoln had no desire to impress people by his appearance. His clothes were dusty and looked as if they had not been ironed. His coat was washed-out and short at the sleeves, and his wrinkled face gave a feeling of somberness, if not melancholy. Douglas, on the other hand, thick-set and short, dressed immaculately. He appeared self-confident and secure. As one bystander described him, “[Douglas’ stride] was the walk of a man who knew where he was and how to get there.”

In addition to their physical differences, the two men had different speaking styles. Douglas, when warmed to a subject, let words rush out in an unbroken stream. Lincoln, however, spoke slowly and carefully, choosing each of his words. Cautiously, Lincoln spoke without any noticeable hesitation, but he lacked the ease and fluidity of Douglas. Douglas, moreover, was quick to answer a question, while Lincoln required time to gather his thoughts. According to a reporter for a Chicago newspaper, “[Lincoln] never failed to find his footing and maintain it firmly when he found it.”

Lincoln, however, had two unique advantages during the debates. First, he was the underdog when compared to Douglas’ national reputation, making it easier for Lincoln to appeal to the public’s sympathy. Second, his speeches and opinions were

fresh, whereas Douglas had already delivered his ideas many times before. Douglas' campaign was also better organized and better financed than Lincoln's.

Their differences could not be more apparent than in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, a series of seven public appearances that would determine who would represent Illinois in the U. S. Senate. Aside from personal attacks, Lincoln and Douglas mostly argued over slavery. Douglas insisted that Lincoln was an abolitionist, attempting to introduce racial equity. Lincoln responded that the Declaration of Independence proclaimed "All men are created equal," a statement which applied to blacks as well as white. In addition, Lincoln argued that the federal government should prevent the spread of slavery in order to "place it on the course of ultimate extinction." Lincoln walked a very fine line in his debate speeches between removing slavery and granting political rights to African Americans. He had to indicate that slavery was ethically wrong, but he could not openly advocate granting full political rights to African Americans. Doing so would jeopardize votes from the southern pro-slavery portion of the state. Douglas also walked the same line for the same reason.

Douglas' solution to slavery was popular sovereignty, whereby each new territory would decide for itself whether to legalize slavery. This concept appealed on two fronts: it removed the fight from Congress, where earlier arguments had become sour and threatened to stop all other work, and it ensured that most new territories would abolish slavery. Lincoln claimed that he acted from a higher set of values than Douglas: he abhorred slavery while Douglas often emphasized its practical value. Douglas frequently cited the U. S. Constitution; Lincoln referred to the Declaration of Independence and its ideal of racial equality.



Although Lincoln and Douglas were similar in many ways, they came from different political backgrounds. While Douglas attempted to impress people with his appearance and speaking ability, Lincoln dismissed how his appearance influenced others. Their opinions on issues of the day were similar, even though they had differing means of dealing with slavery. [From Gerald Mortimer Capers, *Stephen A. Douglas, Defender of the Union*; Charles H. Coleman, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Charleston, Illinois*; David Herbert Donald and Harold Holzer eds., *Lincoln in the Times: The Life of Abraham Lincoln, as originally reported in the New York Times*; and Edward Finch, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. The Lincoln-Douglas Society. <<http://www.lincoln-douglas.org>> (Sept. 9. 2007).]

## **Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton**

Michele Musegades  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

When Abraham Lincoln was running for President of the United States, the debates with Stephen A. Douglas two years earlier in the race for Senate helped him win enough votes to become President. “Public feeling on the slavery issue had become so flammable that Lincoln’s seven debates with Douglas were carried in newspapers across the land, proving the prairie lawyer from Springfield more than a match for the most likely Democratic nominee.” This is the conclusion of historian Doris Goodwin.

In 1858, Lincoln and Douglas both wanted to be the United States Senator from Illinois. Douglas had a better chance of winning. “Lincoln, the challenger, asked Douglas to campaign with him so they could debate the issues,” explained Goodwin. Douglas thought he was better than Lincoln and did not want to waste his time. However, he eventually agreed to debate Lincoln.

One of the most important debates was the first Lincoln-Douglas Debate, in Ottawa on August 21, 1858. As Goodwin described the scene, “Ottawa could claim a permanent population of at most 7,000. But by debate day, between 10,000 and 20,000 more—estimates vary widely—arrived in town from all directions to fill Ottawa to overflowing.”

One of the main debate topics was the slave laws. The slave laws dictated that slaves could not vote, be on a jury or hold a political job. During the Ottawa debate of 1858 Lincoln stated, “I will say here. . . that I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with this institution of slavery and the States where it exists. . . there is no reason

in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

During this debate, Douglas vigorously attacked Lincoln. How to reply, bewildered Lincoln. At his best when he had time carefully to think through his ideas and revise his phrasing, he was clearly uncomfortable in debate format, which required extemporaneous speaking and swift rearrangement of arguments to meet the opponent’s charges,” in the words of historian David Donald. The debate overall went towards Douglas’ side. After the debate Lincoln’s friends all believed that Lincoln was far too defensive at Ottawa and told him that he needed to be more aggressive at the next debate but Lincoln shrugged off all the criticism.

There were several later debates. Both men covered over 4,000 miles within Illinois in the course of the campaign, delivering hundreds of speeches. Goodwin reported that “The young Republican leader, Robert Schurz said that it was indeed the whole American people that listened to the debates.” Lincoln said in Quincy that the debates “were a successive act of a drama. . . to be enacted not merely in the face of audiences like this, but in the face of the nation.”

Eventually, people from all around admired Lincoln’s ability to give speeches after hearing him speak or reading his speeches in the newspaper. The *New York Tribune* later said, “No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience.” Even though Lincoln’s first debate with Douglas in Ottawa was not perfect, Lincoln improved his style and skills to eventually, years later, win the election for President.

Unfortunately, Lincoln was not elected to the Senate. After his defeat, Lincoln wrote to his friend, “I am glad I made the late race. It gave me a hearing on the great and durable question of the age. . . and though I now sink out of view, and shall be forgotten, I believe I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone.” Little did Lincoln know that his unsuccessful debate in Ottawa, Illinois, on April 21, 1858, would have such an effect on the future of the United States of America. [From David Donald, *Lincoln*; Don Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln Speeches and Writings 1832-1858*; Doris Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*; and Harold Holzer, *The Lincoln Douglas Debates*.]

## **Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton**

Elaine Nemsky  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

“To Lincoln the ‘ultimate extinction’ of slavery was a national obligation; to Douglas, the status of slavery was a local responsibility.” These are the words of historian Robert Johannsen. The views of Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln about slavery were brought to the nation’s attention in a series of debates between the two candidates in 1858. The seventh and final debate for U. S. senator between Douglas and Lincoln was held in October 15, 1858, in Alton, Illinois. These debates were an important event in history. The debates focused national attention on Illinois and launched Lincoln into the political spotlight. Like the previous six debates, the main topics of the debate in Alton were slavery and popular sovereignty. Neither of the candidates was for slavery, but Douglas did not feel as strongly that it was morally wrong as did Lincoln. Douglas only thought the popular sovereignty was the fairest way to solve the problem of slave states and free states. Lincoln often referred to a Bible verse: “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” Lincoln believed that either all the states should be free, or they should all be slave; otherwise, he felt the nation could not stay together.

Douglas’ speech focused on what he thought were flaws in Lincoln’s arguments. He strongly disagreed with Lincoln’s interpretations of the Declaration of Independence, especially when it said that all men are created equal. Lincoln thought that it included blacks, but Douglas believed that it was equality only for all white men.

At every one of the debates, Douglas tried to provoke Lincoln by asking the same question, and Lincoln would not answer directly. He asked if Lincoln would vote for the

admission of any more slave states. Douglas contended that if Kansas wanted to come into the Union, the citizens of that state should vote for slave or free. Again, he promoted popular sovereignty. Douglas ended his speech by telling the crowd that in Illinois, they had made the choice of abolishing slavery, and that a black was neither a slave nor a citizen.

Lincoln began by defending himself against everything Douglas had said about him, especially that he had never complained about the Dred Scott decision. He went on to say that Douglas was trying to misrepresent him by telling the crowd that Lincoln thought a black person could become a citizen. When Lincoln started reading his own speech, not commenting on Douglas', he stated that the government would fall if the states were not all free or all slave; he thought the Union would be divided. Of course, his prediction came true in the Civil War.

When Lincoln finished his speech, Douglas presented his rejoinder. Douglas argued against Lincoln's view that the slavery question was the only thing that had ever disturbed the peace and harmony of the Union. Douglas went on to say that the peace of the Union had been disturbed three times, not once: once during the revolutionary war, once on the tariff question, and once on slavery. Douglas made a point that if Lincoln did not want to interfere with slavery where it exists, but wanted to eliminate it, how would he do that? Douglas ended his rejoinder by saying that our country would stay together as long as we abided by the Constitution and obeyed the laws that were passed.

When the election for senator was held, the popular vote was very close. Lincoln won the popular vote 125,430 to 121,609, but Douglas won in the legislature on January

6, 1859, 54 to 46. Some even claim that both of them won because of how close they really were.

Though the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 were a part of Illinois history; they also focused national attention on the issues that were debated, especially slavery. As a result of wide attention, Abraham Lincoln became well known in other states and was able to win the next presidential election. Of course the issues debated in 1858 did not disappear; they forever changed the nation. [Arthur Charles Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870*; Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln Speeches and Writings 1832-1858*; Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; and Becky Richards, "Lincoln's Changing Views on Slavery," *Illinois History*, February 1997.]

## **The 1858 U. S. Senatorial Campaign in Illinois**

Luc H. Nguyen  
Washington Gifted School, Peoria  
Teacher: Mindy Juriga and Janelle Dies

The 1858 campaign for the Illinois Senate seat between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas was said to be an electrifying preview of the presidential campaign to follow two years later. The most intriguing aspect of the 1858 campaign was the seven debates held in Illinois, all of which discussed the raging issue of slavery in the new territories.

Perhaps the most famous debate of the seven was the one held at Freeport, where the rivalry between Lincoln and Douglas came to a boiling point. It is within the Freeport debate that ideas and opinions on slavery have been discussed and evolved. As a result of the 1858 debate held in Freeport, many opinions and ideas on the issue of slavery have been disputed and evolved, which laid the foundation of the Civil War.

The most widely asked question during the 1840s and 1850s was if slavery should be expanded into the new territories. The Southern Democrats wanted to expand slavery into the new territories; the Northern Republicans, however, yearned to abolish slavery in the South and prevent slavery from spreading to the new territories. This issue gave birth to the 1858 campaign to decide a new senator from Illinois. The Freeport debate was one of the seven debates that were part of the 1858 campaign. Lincoln was selected by the Republicans to challenge Douglas' senate seat.

The Freeport debate was held on August 27, 1858. Over the course of the debate, the only topic discussed was slavery in the new territories. There were many conflicting ideas and opinions on this topic. One of such opinions is the freedom of the people's choice in choosing to include or exclude slavery. Douglas did not care whether slavery in



the new territories was approved or not; however, he insisted that the people of the new territories should have the choice to legalize slavery or not. Douglas believed that the federal government should remain neutral and not interfere with the people's decisions on slavery. Lincoln, on the other hand, disapproved the idea of the possible extension of slavery into the new territories. While he held his belief that blacks were inferior to whites, Lincoln thought that slavery was a wrong, and that it was inconsistent with the principles and practices of the democratic government. Lincoln contradicted Douglas by stating that the government should not play a neutral part in the extension of slavery and encouraged the government to prevent the extension of slavery. He hoped that if the extension of slavery was prevented, the idea might catch on, and slavery in the South would end. Both Lincoln and Douglas strongly held to their beliefs at the Freeport debate and aggressively argued to support their sides of the debate. The issue of slavery continued to evolve.

The debate reached its climax when Lincoln asked Douglas the following famous question: "Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limit prior to the formation of a State Constitution?" He asked this question because he planned to put Douglas in an anti-slavery position. Because of this anti-slavery position, the Southerners would be angered, and Douglas might lose his supporters in the South for his presidential campaign later on. Lincoln's ultimate plan was to erase Douglas' chance of becoming president, so Douglas would not be able to make decisions on the extension of slavery. When it was finally Douglas' turn to speak, he confidently answered Lincoln's question with a yes. He believed that a territory could exclude slavery by creating laws

that were “unfriendly to the institution.” Although this answer won Douglas the Senate seat, his firm answer was remembered by the Southern Democrats who refused to support him in his race for president. Lincoln had successfully placed Douglas in an anti-slavery position and guaranteed that Douglas would likely never become President of the United States. If Douglas became president, the chances of slavery entering the new territories would increase, but Lincoln had already erased that possibility.

The Freeport debate played an important part in Illinois history. For one thing, Lincoln’s fame soared to national heights because of the attention he gained from the debate. Because Lincoln’s fame rose so much he was ready to become president and guide Illinois down the path of anti-slavery. Also, both Lincoln’s and Douglas’ ideas and opinions helped people decide if slavery was to be abolished or not. In the Freeport debate the ideas and opinions of slavery were disputed and evolved, and people began to choose between slavery and abolitionism. The most important and definite impact of the Freeport debate and the campaign of 1858 was that both slowly pushed Illinois towards an abolitionist point of view. It was important for the people of Illinois to hold a negative view of slavery as the nation further divided itself in the conflict of slavery. When the Civil War occurred, the people of Illinois knew to oppose slavery and help in the arguments with the knowledge they have learned. In conclusion, the Freeport debate ultimately prepared Illinois for the coming of the Civil War.

As a result of the debate held in Freeport, many opinions and ideas on the issue of slavery had been disputed and evolved, which laid the foundation of the Civil War. Lincoln and Douglas are two of the most historical figures that came from Illinois. Although each held opposing ideas, they worked together through their ideas and

opinions to mold and shape the history of slavery in Illinois in their legendary Freeport debate. [From Illinois Centennial Commission, *The Era of the Civil War*; Regina Kelly, *Lincoln Douglas; Lincoln–Douglas Debates, June 1858–October, 1858*. Online Detroit: Gale (2003): <<http://find.galegroup.com/srex/printdoc.do?content.htm>.> (Aug 27, 2007); Ralph G. Newman, *Lincoln for the Ages; Second Debate with Stephen A. Douglas*. The National Park Service. <<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate2.htm>> (Aug. 31, 2007); State Historical Library, *The Great Debates*; and Gallagher Wagner, et al., eds. *Civil War Desk Reference*.]

## **Lincoln vs. Douglas Debate: A Fight For Basic Human Rights**

Morgan O'Neil  
Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale  
Teacher: Nick Weshinsky

Equality is the state in which there is the same quantity or measure, value, or status. For thousand of years black and other minorities have been thought to be less than whites because of the color of their skin. However, in the Declaration of Independence, it states that all men are created equal and deserve certain unalienable rights. During 1858, Illinois senatorial candidates, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, traveled to seven different locations to debate over topics, the main one being slavery. On Saturday, September 18, 1858, around twelve thousand people gathered in Charleston, Illinois, to listen as Lincoln and Douglas gave their opinion on this and several other topics. Slavery was an issue heavily debated all over the country. The crowd was in favor of Lincoln going into the debate due to his relations to the town in earlier years. This was important for Lincoln because he was not very well known except in some parts of Illinois. Although he did not win the senate election, the nation started to give him the political attention that he deserved.

Lincoln admitted that while he disagreed with slavery, he did not feel that black equality could ever be truly achieved and was not fighting for it. He simply wanted it to be observed that blacks deserved the basic human rights that the United States had originally fought and were recognized in the Declaration of Independence. Douglas' opinions were a lot different. Lincoln began by telling the crowd very simply what his thoughts on slavery were: "I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality between the white and black races. . ." Lincoln

realized that there would always be barriers between blacks and whites and talked very little about the fight for rights of blacks. He turned his attentions to producing evidence that Douglas and other Democrats were fighting for slavery, which could not happen in the United States. Lincoln's idea was that "the Union cannot exist half slave and half free. . . ." Lincoln knew that the question of slavery could only be answered with all of the states, or none. By living in a divided nation there could never be peace among the states. Lincoln spent the rest of his hour-long speech exposing Douglas and his attempt to force a slave constitution on the state of Kansas against their consent. He showed the crowd proof of what Douglas had been trying to do with a bill in his hand. The crowd erupted in applause when he was done speaking which made it evident that more than two-thirds of the people present were in favor of Lincoln.

The Democratic Party had taken a stance on slavery by saying, "they rejected blacks' basic humanity and blacks could never be American citizens. . . ." The Republicans took that idea and created their main argument against it. Douglas agreed with the statement whole-heartedly and stated, "I say that this government was established on the white basis. It was made by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and never should be administered by any except white men." He denied the accusations that Lincoln had made against him and told the crowd that Lincoln was just bringing up these issues in an attempt to divert attention from himself. The crowd could not be swayed though, and Douglas spent the rest of his allotted time rehashing previous statements he had made in other debates. His speech disappointed many of his followers and those in favor of him. Lincoln continued his triumph with his rebuttal. The debate ended with Lincoln's rebuttal and the roar of cheers for him. It was

obvious that Lincoln had won the debate. Douglas' recapitulation of previous speeches won him no more support, and it showed that the ultimate strength lay within Abraham Lincoln.

Although little known throughout Illinois, he was no stranger to the area around Charleston. Eight miles south of the town was the home of his father and stepmother, Thomas and Sarah Lincoln. Because his father had died a few years earlier, Lincoln had been making frequent visits to the cabin to help his stepmother care for the place. By being around the people of Charleston beforehand helped him gain their support before the debate had even started. The Charleston debate also proved to the audience that if the United States was not brought together under a single idea, then it would eventually fall apart. The United States needed leaders that expressed their ideas and followed through with them, which was something Abraham Lincoln was able to do in that speech and the others. The Charleston debate helped Lincoln gain the attention he needed by the nation in order to further his political career. [From Paul M. Angle, *Created Equal?*; Nancy Easter-Shick and Bonnie B. Clark, *Life in Downtown Charleston, Illinois 1830-1998*; Orlando B. Ficklin, "The Fourth Joint Debate Between Lincoln and Douglas," *Rockford Republican*, Oct. 10, 1858; J. Harding, ed., "Lincoln and Douglas at Charleston," *Prairie Beacon News* Sept. 24, 1858; Harold Holzer, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*; R. D. Monroe, "Debating Douglas on the National Stage, 1857-1858." 2000. Northern Illinois University <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/biography7.html>> (Sept. 3, 2007); John T. Morton, "Lincoln and Douglas at Charleston," *Quincy Daily Whig and Republican*. Sept. 23, 1858; and S. E. Thomas, *The Teachers College Bulletin*.]

## **Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Freeport**

Elizabeth Pearson  
University Laboratory High School, Urbana  
Teacher: Adele Suslick

Although the 1858 race for the U. S. senate seat between Democratic incumbent Stephen A. Douglas and Republican Abraham Lincoln eventually became a war of words, ideas, and strategy, it did not begin that way. Lincoln was a shrewd and charismatic public speaker and could easily sway an audience, but he was not as well known as Senator Douglas and had great difficulty attracting crowds. So a day or so after Douglas spoke in a town, Lincoln would speak there as well, taking advantage of the large audience Douglas had attracted. Eventually, the Republicans challenged Douglas to a series of seven debates during which both men took turns speaking and questioning each other on a particular day. Refusing to participate would have hurt Douglas' campaign, so he agreed to appear, and thus the debates were scheduled.

The Freeport debate was the second of seven between Lincoln and Douglas. It occurred on August 27 in Freeport, a town in northwestern Illinois. The main topic of the debate was slavery, and the key issue was whether slavery should exist in the western territories of the United States.

Lincoln opposed slavery and argued vehemently that it should not expand into the territories. Douglas, on the other hand, supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, a law lifting the ban on slavery in territories north of 36° 30'. He claimed that popular sovereignty allowed a state to decide whether or not slavery was legal within its boundaries. Douglas believed that civil war would be the only outcome if the government tried to restrict slavery, and civil war was something that the senator greatly

feared. He stated emphatically that he would not support any course of action that might cause a split in the Union.

Lincoln fiercely challenged Douglas at Freeport, Illinois, on the topic of slavery in the territories. He asked Douglas whether settlers could prohibit slavery before a territory became a state. Douglas replied that under the doctrine of popular sovereignty, they could. Elaborating, Douglas explained that if settlers did not establish a slave code, no one could legally bring slaves into the area. This response came to be known as the Freeport Doctrine and lost Douglas a great deal of popularity in Southern slaveholding states where voters did not want restrictions of any sort placed on slavery.

Douglas, nevertheless, defeated Lincoln in the senatorial race, winning 54 to 46 when the Illinois state legislature voted. Many newspapers covered the Lincoln-Douglas Debates; therefore, people throughout the country knew what these men were thinking. Since Democratic politicians relied heavily on Southern support, Douglas' Freeport Doctrine cost him the presidency when he ran against Lincoln two years later.

In conclusion, both Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas had many loyal supporters. The seven debates that took place between them in 1858 showcased their political platforms. Despite his charisma, Douglas was unable to convince the public that popular sovereignty and the Freeport Doctrine would resolve tensions associated with the expansion of slavery into the territories. Lincoln used this to his advantage, and although Douglas was able to win the senatorial campaign, Lincoln won the presidency in 1860.

[From Gerald M. Capers, *Stephen A. Douglas*; "Lincoln-Douglas Debates."

*Encyclopaedia Britannica. Britannica Online. 2007. Encyclopaedia Britannica.*

<<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9048342/Lincoln-Douglas-debates>> (Aug. 26,



2007); Lincoln-Douglas Society (Freeport, Ill.). *Freeport Debate Centennial*; "Popular Sovereignty." Def. 2. *Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster Online*. 2007. Merriam-Webster, Inc.

<<http://www.mw.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=popular+sovereignty>>

(Nov. 27, 2007); Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*; Saul Sigelschiffer, *The American Conscience*; and Michael Ward, "Democratic Party." *Encyclopedia of American History*.]

## **Freeport Lincoln-Douglas Debate of August 27, 1858**

Luke Peters  
Oregon High School, Oregon  
Teacher: Sara Werckle

In the year 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas ran against each other for a seat in the U. S. Senate. Lincoln was the Republican candidate. His views, which mirrored those of his party, were for slavery's containment due to its moral wrongs. Douglas was the Democratic candidate. Douglas was pro-states' rights, against the establishment of national bank, and for the use of popular sovereignty to decide upon slavery. The two men debated in seven cities in Illinois during the year. The format of the debates included an opening speech of one hour, the reply, one hour and a half; the close, half an hour. The main topic of the debates was the topic that most divided these parties and the country at the time: slavery.

The second debate in the series took place in Freeport, Illinois. The crowd was "fully fifteen thousand" and had "come to see the fight," according to an early-twentieth century historian. The spectator majority held Republican, and so had abolitionist or anti-slavery views. Lincoln opened the debate. He answered seven questions that were put to him by Douglas at the Ottawa debate, the prior debate. After giving initial, brief answers to all of the questions, Lincoln went back and answered each question in depth.

One of the questions regarded the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Lincoln said that he would be "exceedingly glad to see slavery abolished in the District of Columbia." He would only stand for it, however, if the change was gradual, to a majority's vote, and compensated those that would sustain loss. This idea stood out because it showed that Lincoln did not want an instant change that would bring turmoil to

the country. He wanted the issue to end well.

After the opening session, Lincoln attacked Douglas with several counter questions over various issues. Lincoln then said that Douglas used “evil genius” to achieve his accomplishments. After this attack, Lincoln discussed the issue that Douglas “voted down the Chase amendment to ‘leave room’ for the Dred Scott decision.” (The Dred Scott case involved a slave who was denied freedom by a court of law because the Constitution gave no rights to slaves. This case became a basis for many of the arguments about slavery.)

After Lincoln’s opening, Douglas spoke. He answered Lincoln’s questions, first addressing the issue of Kansas, saying “she has people enough for a free state.” After receiving cheers, Douglas answered another question. He said that “the people of a territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution. This statement became known as the “Freeport Doctrine.” It lost Douglas support of many Southern slave owners. Douglas believed that each state should have the right to decide about slavery. After answering questions, Douglas spoke.

Douglas spoke on various topics. He spoke to the crowd about African American equality. He stated that “those of you [the crowd-members] who believe that the negro is your equal. . . have a right to entertain those opinions.” The crowd angrily rejected this. Douglas then defended his beliefs, addressing the crowd on issues such as induction of new territories. After defending his own claims, Douglas also made fun of Lincoln’s answers, pointing out that Lincoln “was not pledged” to his beliefs. Finally, Douglas supported himself, saying that if “State constitutions ought to be submitted to the people before the admissions of the State into the Union,” he would firmly support it. Douglas

finished just as time expired, saying that Lincoln only wanted to divide the Democratic Party so as to get into the U. S. Senate.

At last, Lincoln gave his rejoinder. The audience was at that point “eager and hot,” according to one historian. Lincoln began by boldly saying that if any member of legislature believed that Lincoln was inconsistent with his beliefs, as Douglas said he was, he would “retire from the race.” Lincoln expressed his belief that having a single slave station in the country would not establish the whole nation as pro-slavery. To end his rejoinder, Lincoln addressed Douglas. He said that Douglas, even though he was trying to make progress in the North, was failing and would one day be forced to unite with those he fought. As time ended, Lincoln was loudly applauded and support was declared for Lincoln.

The Freeport debate was one of powerful, assertive questioning, answering, and accusation by the two men. The views and opinions of each man were very much exposed in the debate. The mentality of a compromise between slavery and anti-slavery views by Douglas was shown. Lincoln’s overall anti-slavery mentality was also exposed. The debate was fueled by slavery, the subject in America about whose monstrosities and the difficulty of solving people were made aware.

Lincoln and Douglas held six other debates throughout the state of Illinois. The debate over the issue of slavery continued after the debates. Although Douglas won the election, the debates were also successful for Lincoln. He gained national recognition and notice for his anti-slavery views. The debates helped Lincoln to develop the reputation that would later get him into the White House. [From Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln 1809-1858*; Francis Browne, *The Every-day Life of Abraham Lincoln*;

Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln*; Ira Krakow, “What Were the Lincoln-Douglas Debates About?” *The United States Constitution by Ira Krakow*  
<<http://www.irakrakov.com/constitution/category/lincoln-douglas-debates/>> (Oct. 18, 2007); and Andrew Pinzler, The Ethical Culture Fieldston School. “The Lincoln-Douglas Debates (1858).” *The Fieldston School United States History Survey*  
<<http://www.pinzler.com/ushistory/lindougsupp.html>> (Oct. 14, 2007).]

## **Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Galesburg**

Tayler Pulvirenti  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

Galesburg, Illinois was selected as the scene for the fifth famous Lincoln-Douglas Debate. It was moved from Knoxville to Galesburg because many slaves and fugitives were being rescued from the Underground Railroad at that time and there was fear of problems arising in Knoxville. Douglas was well known and every one seemed to like him in Galesburg. However, it was different for Lincoln; people did not like him and considered him a stranger. Douglas sat as a judge in Knoxville and knew the country very well.

Lincoln arrived in Knoxville on Wednesday night, coming from Peoria, Illinois. The people of Knoxville were already jealous of Galesburg's prestige at Knoxville's expense. They decided to make the most of all the small celebrations in their town. People from Knoxville gathered around Lincoln's hotel, demanding Lincoln's explanation on why Galesburg was selected for the debate, when Knoxville was freeing the slaves for whom Lincoln stood. Lincoln stood on his balcony and told the people, "My friends, the less you see of me, the better you will like me." Comparatively, the small body of Democrats in town gave Douglas a warm welcome to Knoxville.

Nearly all the wagons and the floats approaching Galesburg displayed banners or streamers inscribed with slogans voicing the humor and partisanship of the two factions. Among them could be read "Honest Abe," "the rail splitter," "free states," "free men," and "Lincoln the Giant Killer." Lincoln was even called the snapping turtle and Douglas

was called the lordly lion. Republicans said that it is better to have a live dog than a dead lion. But Lincoln did not care; he still stood his ground and expressed his beliefs.

The crowd on Knox College campus grew denser as the spectators from the streets began to seek places among those already taken. Galesburg was one of those towns where it had been agreed before hand that Douglas should speak first. The 1858 debate was important because a U. S. Senate seat from Illinois was at stake between Lincoln and Douglas. Seven debates in all were conducted in each of the state's seven congressional districts.

Douglas believed the chief aim of the nation should be to expand its border and its institutions, extending the area of freedom for whites. The morality of slavery to Douglas was a matter of local opinion, though he probably was personally opposed to the institution. To Lincoln the immorality of slavery was absolute. Such an absolute ought to rule in legislating for new territories like Kansas. Lincoln stated that in the most memorable line of the Galesburg debate, Douglas was blowing out the moral lights around us when he maintained that anyone who wanted slaves had the right to hold them. Henry Clay said that those who would repress all tendencies to liberty and ultimate emancipations of slaves must go back to the era of our liberty and independence and muzzle the cannon that thunders its annual joys return.

On August 21, many historians attended the debate that marked the turning point in the national future of both the Republican and Democratic Party. During the Galesburg debate, Lincoln answered seven questions. One important question posed to Lincoln was, why are you fighting for the rights of black people? He responded by

saying that slaves are just the same as us; they deserve the right to be free as much as the whites.

Douglas uttered many famous quotes during this debate, one of which he stated as an answer to the second question, “Can the people of a United States territory in any lawful way against the wish of any citizen of the United States exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of the state constitution.” Douglas responded by saying we would not have slavery without the support of the local police regulations.

Douglas gained the Senate but lost the presidency. The young Republican Party failed to win enough seats to elect Lincoln to the Senate, however, Lincoln held his own against the leading Democrats through his speeches in the Cooper Union, New York, and throughout New England. Lincoln was the voice of moderation and ultimately became the Republican nominee for president of the United States.

Douglas did not make it easy for Lincoln. Douglas tried to revive the Mexican War issue making it a liability for Lincoln and commented on Lincoln’s opposition to the war and failure to support American troops. Lincoln replied by saying

I think my friend the judge, is at fault when he charges me at the time when I was in Congress of having opposed our soldiers who were fighting in the Mexican war. The judge did not make his charges very distinctly, but I can tell you what he can prove by referring to the record. You remember I was an old Whig, and whenever the Democratic Party tried to get me to vote that the war had been righteously begun by the President I would not do it. But whenever they ask for money, or land-warrants, or anything to pay the soldiers there, during all that time, I gave the same vote as Judge Douglas.

Lincoln lost the senate seat but, two years later, won the presidency.

In the end we all know that Lincoln and Douglas were two great men. They were just fighting for their peoples’ rights and what they believed was right. [From Earnest E. Calkins, *They Broke the Prairie*; William A. Degregorio, *The Complete Book of U. S.*



*Presidents*; Paul Findley, *Lincoln*; Knox College Special Collections and Archives, “The Fifth Lincoln-Douglas Debate October 7, 1858 Galesburg, Illinois,”  
<[www.library.knox.edu/sca/sca/cfm](http://www.library.knox.edu/sca/sca/cfm)> (Aug. 16, 2007); Edwin Erle Sparks, ed., *Lincoln Series, Vol. 1, The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*; Richard M. Weaver, “Created Equal? The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858.” *National Review*, November 5, 1990.]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton**

Katayun Salehi

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

The last Lincoln–Douglas Debate occurred on October 15, 1858, at Alton, Illinois. More than five thousand people attended, but many in the audience were not even from Illinois, indicating how intensely people wanted to learn about the two Illinois candidates running for the U.S. Senate. The debate, like the others before it, followed a strict format.

Douglas spoke first for an hour; Lincoln responded for an hour and a half; Douglas then concluded by refuting Lincoln’s claims and adding closing remarks for half an hour.

Stephen Arnold Douglas, born in 1813 in Vermont, was a member of the Democratic Party and a U.S. Senator. Lincoln, born in Kentucky in 1809, was affiliated with the newly established Republican Party. Both men focused primarily on slavery during the Alton debate.

Douglas argued that each state should determine whether individuals could legally own slaves within its jurisdiction. He believed that states themselves could settle this issue without jeopardizing either the Union or the federal government’s ability to function effectively:

I then said, have often repeated and now again assert, that in my opinion this government can endure forever, divided into free and slave states as our fathers made it – each state having the right to prohibit, abolish or sustain slavery just as it pleases.

Douglas called the state’s right to determine its own laws “equality among all the states.”

His reasoning with regard to slavery was straightforward: the federal government should

not establish laws establishing slavery because each state deserved to do so itself. He stated:

This government was made upon the great basis of the sovereignty of the States, the right of each state to regulate its own domestic institutions to suit itself, and that right was conferred with the understanding and expectation that inasmuch as each locality had separate interests, each locality must have different and distinct local and domestic institutions, corresponding to its wants and interests.

Douglas' notion of popular sovereignty placed authority strictly in the hands of the majority. This majority, it should be noted, included only free men, not slaves. Douglas, moreover, did not support popular sovereignty at the federal level. Since each state had different needs, each state had to create its own laws.

Douglas presented his arguments so well that people feared for their freedom. To emphasize his position, Douglas used a number of rhetorical strategies during his presentation. For example, he frequently restated or reviewed an idea so that the audience became familiar with it. He also directly attacked Lincoln's beliefs. At one point, for instance, he stated that Lincoln and the Republican Party were against the Union because they opposed states determining their own slave laws. Douglas also argued that Lincoln merely wanted to create controversy among states by forcing them to abolish slavery. He concluded by pointing out specific flaws in Lincoln's thinking.

Lincoln, on the other hand, vehemently opposed slavery during the Alton debate. He considered slavery immoral, regardless of how many supported it. He believed that all men were equal and found support for his argument in the Constitution. He argued, moreover, that justice must be based on preset standards, not on popular vote. Lincoln

also asserted that the presence of slavery depended on whether it was fair to all people in the Union and not whether it was fair only to those who were free. Since most slaves hated bondage, Lincoln tried to represent their point of view. He also noted that those who first introduced slavery imposed it on all the people in the Union, thus making slavery unjust. Lincoln realized that people in southern Illinois were afraid to speak out against slavery and that they silently accepted it. He argued:

How many Democrats are there about here who have left slave States and come into the free state of Illinois to get rid of the institution of slavery?...I will ask you, if the policy you are now advocating had prevailed when this country was in a territorial condition, where would you have gone to get rid of it? Where would you have found your free state or territory to go to? And when hereafter, for any cause, the people in this place shall desire to find new homes, if they wish to be rid of the institution, where will they find the place to go to?.

Lincoln sympathized with those who were too timid to speak out. He tried to connect with them during the debate in order to excite them and to help them recognize the negative aspects of slavery.

In conclusion, both Douglas and Lincoln raised important points during the Alton debate. Both forced the audience to examine their views on slavery, and both argued persuasively. The crowd responded enthusiastically by shouting positive and negative comments throughout and by cheering when their favorite candidate argued well. In short, people were moved by both of these compelling speakers. [From Lionel Crocker, *An Analysis of Lincoln and Douglas as Public Speakers and Debaters*; “Stephen Arnold Douglas, (1813 - 1861).” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

<<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=D000457>> (Sept. 9, 2007) ;

Charles R. Kesler, "Giving Us Lincoln." Rev. of *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, by Harry V. Jaffa. *National Review* 57.23 (Dec.2005): 108-109. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO.

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=19082062&site=ehost-live>> (Sept. 6, 2007); "The Last Joint Debate at Alton." *Lincoln - Douglas Debate Number Seven, 1858. 1.1 (1997)*. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO.

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=21212787&site=ehost-live>> (Sept. 6, 2007); Abraham Lincoln, "The Real Issue from Lincoln's Speech at Alton Debate", Oct. 15th. Alton, Illinois. 15 Oct. 1858. *Daily Pantagraph* [Bloomington] 15 Oct. 1858. *Illinois Historical Digitization Projects: Northern Illinois University Libraries*. 2002.

<<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2287:1.lincoln>> (Aug. 27, 2007); "Abraham Lincoln, (1809 - 1865)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=L000313>> (Sept. 9, 2007) ; and "The Lincoln - Douglas Debates in Brief." *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. The Lincoln-Douglas Society of Freeport, Illinois. <<http://www.lincoln-douglas.org/>> (Sept. 6, 2007).]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Alton**

Kortny Sloan  
Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville  
Teacher: Michael Voss

On October 15, candidates for an Illinois seat in the U. S. Senate, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, debated for the last time in Alton. There twenty-one years earlier a pro-slavery mob had murdered Elijah P. Lovejoy for publishing an anti-slavery newspaper. Gustave Koerner pictured the effect of two months of campaigning on the two men.

Was the Lincoln-Douglas Debate of Alton, Illinois, one of Lincoln's most powerful speeches? Douglas occupied an hour in opening. Lincoln followed, occupying an hour and a half, and Douglas closed with a speech of half an hour. After the adjournment of the meeting, Dr. Hope, National Democratic candidate for Congress, appeared in front of the stand and asked to be heard, but because his first words were against Douglas, that man's friends in the crowd set up a storm of yells, which completely drowned out Hope's voice. The noisy parties could be easily detected as rowdies and drunkards who kept up a continual shout for Douglas. One man had a quart whisky bottle, which he held aloft, and screamed out an invitation for the "Douglas boys" to come and drink. The quart of whisky soon disappeared.

Douglas rose and brought the great series of debates to a close with a smashing finish. Douglas stated that slavery had never endangered the Union. "Douglas cared more for the great principle of self-government . . . than I do for all the Negroes in Christendom." He told once more how local legislation could prohibit slavery.

Douglas' deep voice was giving out. Lincoln showed no sign of fatigue. Democrats supporting President James Buchanan were present in force to upset him, even heckling him at the speaker's platform. Douglas struck at the Buchanan administration harder than at Lincoln. He roared that the Administration Democrats were traitorously working with the Republicans in this campaign.

Lincoln began telling how pleasant it was to hear Douglas attack Buchanan. Becoming serious, Lincoln concluded his parting the debates with a summary of the silent doctrines of his campaign appeal. He spent a great deal of time refuting the "beautiful fabrication" of his opponent that he sought "a perfect social and political equality between the white and black races read from his own speeches and those of Henry Clay to prove that the Republican position on the Negro question was that of the men who founded the Republic." One by one he covered the important points of the controversy: the danger that blacks might become property, "and nothing but property . . . in all the states of this union." The necessity of non-extension and slavery's menace to the nation's unity were important. The real issue of the vote "is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other 'diving rights of kings.'" This speech was one of the most powerful speeches Lincoln ever made.

Lincoln brought his campaign to an end with an address in Springfield, on October 30. In his conclusion—the only part of his speech has been preserved—he spoke movingly of his own motives. One the same day Lincoln tried to combat an untruth that accused him of bigotry.

The end of the long debate was moments away. Lincoln reduced months of argument to a simple issue, so clear that no one could misunderstand it, so freighted with moral significance that none could regard it with an easy conscience. Lincoln won the debate. [From Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, *The Living Lincoln*; William E. Baringer, *Lincoln's Rise to Power*; Abraham Lincoln, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*; and Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*.]



## **Vox Populi: A Study on Political Opinions: The Great Charleston Debate, 1858**

Lisa Sproat

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

Modern-day Charleston is a small university town about one hundred miles east of Springfield. It is home to several Lincoln sites, including a small museum built on the actual spot of the fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate. The Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum commemorates the fourth

of seven debates held in 1858 between Lincoln and Douglas. Because it bordered Little Egypt, the pro-slavery part of Illinois, it is surprising that Charleston



Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum

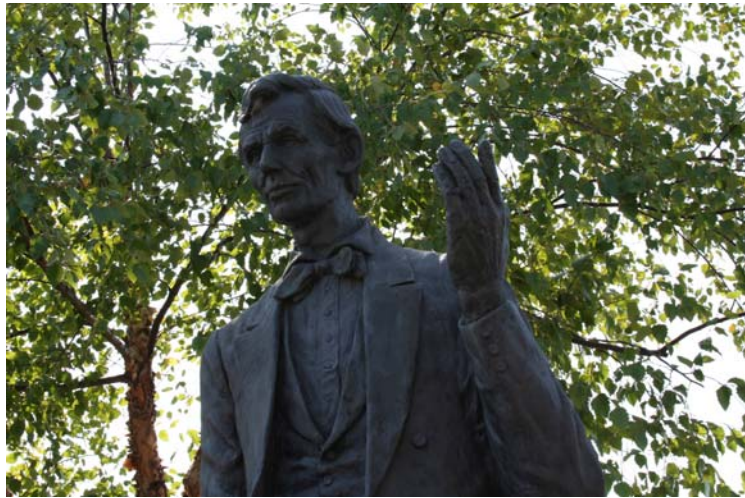
welcomed the Republican

Party so enthusiastically. Lincoln was cheered and applauded by a group of supporters when he arrived in town on September 18, 1858. Douglas, too, had followers waiting for him, but all festivities ceased when, facing a crowd that rivaled Freeport's (the second debate of seven), Lincoln began to speak.

The Charleston debate began with Lincoln dismissing the possibility that African Americans would ever be as free as whites in America. Later in his address, Lincoln invited Orlando Ficklin to the lectern to provide testimony absolving Lincoln from difficulty he had encountered while arguing with Douglas about the Mexican-American

War. (Lincoln had voted against it.) Lincoln hoped Ficklin would back him up, but despite their friendship, Ficklin remained non-committal. Lincoln ended his presentation with an assortment of colorful phrases, surprising many reporters in the audience.

Within a matter of days, biased articles with headlines proclaiming “Lincoln Strips the Giant Dry!” and “Great Rout of the Douglasites!” began to appear throughout the state. The *Weekly Belleville Advocate*, a Republican



paper, ran a story on September 29, 1858 that called Lincoln “our first, last, and only

choice for Senator.” It criticized Douglas by describing his speech as identical to one he had delivered at Elmer’s Hill, and it concluded by praising Lincoln and presenting his closing remarks verbatim, right down to the last shout of “Yes! Yes!” from the



(Model of Crowds at the Debate)

audience. No similar transcription of Douglas's speech ever appeared.

The *Rockford Republican* celebrated Lincoln too. It never mentioned Douglas' warm reception by the audience but focused instead on the thousands who supported Lincoln. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* ran a story criticizing Douglas' inability to draw a crowd and suggested that either the "Douglasites" were "numerically of little importance at the points selected" or Democrats simply did not care for politics. The reporter of this story made it clear that he did not believe in the "stereotyped braggadocio" that "the people are all for Douglas."

The *Prairie Beacon News* of Paris, Illinois, favored Lincoln by publishing a medium-length article about Douglas' banners and the "lies" posted upon them. It even called a Douglasite with a Democratic banner "slow-witted." The article concluded by observing that two-thirds of the crowd supported Lincoln.

Like the *Prairie Beacon News* and the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, the *Weekly North-Western Gazette* published a short synopsis of the debate and claimed that most of the crowd was for Lincoln. One article even likened Lincoln's arguments to a pyramid, which Douglas, despite serious effort, could not move. It also accused Douglas of being so inconsistent that people could not rely on him.

Less is known about the Democratic response to the Charleston debate. Most Democratic states lay further south, and their newspapers covered mostly local issues. It seems likely that the debate was reported more widely by Illinois newspapers, and since the majority of these were Republican, the Democrats received scant coverage.

The *Weekly Bulletin* of Freeport, Illinois, however, did support Douglas although its coverage suggests a less political orientation and casual insults prevail throughout.

The *New York Tribune* also poked fun at Lincoln's appearance, and referred to him as "tall and awkward, with a face of grotesque ugliness," a comment that may have been influenced by a derogatory phrase for Lincoln popular at the time: the Ape from Illinois.

In the end, Douglas won the Senate seat, but people were so favorably impressed by Lincoln that most of them voted for him when he ran for president, proving that "one can win a battle, but lose the war."

Lincoln had the press to thank for that.



(Statue of Stephen Douglas)

*I would like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Vernon Burton of the History Department of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign for an extremely insightful interview.*

[From "Abraham Lincoln." *Weekly Belleville Advocate* 29 Sept. 1858. *Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project*. 2000. Northern Illinois University.

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## **Photographs**

Lisa Sproat, Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum. Photograph. 2007. *DeviantArt.com*.

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## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Galesburg: Summary, Influences and Effect on History**

Miriam Taour  
Oregon High School, Oregon  
Teacher: Sara Werckle

In August 1858 two candidates for the position of U. S. Senator of Illinois began a series of debates. These two candidates were Abraham Lincoln, a fairly insignificant man at the time, and Stephen A. Douglas, “the biggest man in Illinois.” In Galesburg, on October 7, 1858, the fifth of these debates was held. The two men argued significant issues of the time, which backed their individual beliefs and had a considerable impact on American history.

There were several important ideas argued in the Lincoln-Douglas Debate held at Galesburg. The first was expansion and those laws governing the new territories. At this point in history the country was rapidly growing and expanding westward. Douglas encouraged growth and did not wish to enforce slavery or anti-slavery practices on these new states. He felt “each State must do as it pleases,” as one historian wrote. Lincoln, however, disagreed. He argued that slavery should be banned in these new states.

The two men also spent much time pointing out inconsistencies in each other’s arguments. Douglas pointed out that Lincoln altered his ideas on slavery depending on whether he was in a pro-slavery or anti-slavery county, and he did not call his party Republican in every county. Lincoln countered by stating that Douglas could not keep the same name for his party in every county either, and brought up Douglas’ use of a fraudulent newspaper article in a former debate for which Douglas had clearly apologized, in one of his former arguments. Lincoln suggested that Douglas may have

conspired with other men to create the article.

Lastly, they debated on how black people should be treated. Lincoln said that although blacks were inferior, they deserved to have the same rights as white men. He said that these rights were protected in the Constitution. Douglas tried to remain neutral on the topic and treated the issue of slavery as one of property, not morality. Douglas believed that the Constitution was made protecting only the rights of white people.

The views held by both Lincoln and Douglas during these debates were greatly influenced by their individual beliefs. Abraham Lincoln believed that black people, although inferior to the white race, should be equal to whites. This influenced his arguments against slavery. He believed that it was immoral and wrong. Douglas did not believe that slavery was immoral and stayed neutral on that issue; however, Douglas “consistently stood for the Union and its expansion,” according to one historian. This explains his belief that each new state had the right to choose whether slavery would be allowed or banned and could make laws in support of or against slavery, just as long as they were people creating new states. This also explains his insistence on westward expansion. In the debate, Douglas pushed the importance of America needing to grow. The individual opinions of Lincoln and Douglas had a strong impact on their views in the debate.

The Galesburg Lincoln-Douglas Debate also influenced American history. The most obvious thing was that it helped Douglas gain enough supporters to win the election and secure the position of Illinois senator. But it also had an influence on Abraham Lincoln’s run for the presidency two years later. The debate helped to spread the ideas of Lincoln and other Republicans, and gained him support for his election to office. The



debate helped Lincoln come from being “a somewhat obscure politician in Illinois” to being “one of the foremost antislavery leaders and popular orators in the United States,” wrote N. Dwight Harris. Evidently, the Galesburg Lincoln-Douglas Debate had considerable effect on American history.

Although the Galesburg Lincoln-Douglas Debate is not the most well known in the series of debates the two men held, it most definitely deserves recognition. The Galesburg Lincoln-Douglas Debate was a discussion of the issues of slavery in new states, inconsistencies in each candidate’s arguments, and how blacks should be treated. Each man’s views strongly influenced American history. Undoubtedly, the debate held in Galesburg was a notable historic event. [From Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project. “Lincoln Biography.” <<http://Lincoln.lib.niu.edu/giointro.html>> (Oct. 10, 2007); Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Abraham Lincoln*; and Dwight N. Harris, *The History of Negro Servitude In Illinois and of the Slavery Agitation in That State*; Robert P. Howard, *Illinois*.]

## **Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Freeport**

Morgan R. Timm  
Washington Gifted School, Peoria  
Teacher: Mindy Juriga and Janelle Dies

The morning of August 27, 1858, dawned cold and gray, but the dreary conditions did not dispel the excitement that buzzed through the town of Freeport, Illinois. It was the day that the celebrated Lincoln-Douglas Debates came to Freeport. Little did these people there know the effect that this debate would have on the United States of America, the laws of Illinois, and Freeport itself. As a result of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Freeport, old wounds were reopened, raising once again the issues of slavery and popular sovereignty and plunging the people of Illinois into a riotous argument that eventually impacted the entire country.

From the time the first settlers landed on the Virginia coast, slavery was an issue in America, and the growing population called for some sort of law to govern it. To cope with the demands of the states, the Missouri Compromise was signed. The Missouri Compromise decreed that all states above the thirty-sixth line of latitude were free, while those below it were slave. This solution quieted the argument for a few years, but the rebirth of this controversial topic was inevitable. Several more laws were passed in the next few years, unintentionally giving most of the power to the North.

With the admission of Alabama into the Union, there were eleven states in the North and eleven in the South. But although the number of states was equal, the number of representatives in each sanction was quite lopsided. In the House, the North had much more power than did the South. At that time, the North had one hundred and five congressmen, the South only eighty-one. This myriad of arguments was what triggered

the Missouri Compromise; lawmakers hoped that it would keep the balance between the slave and free states.

Then suddenly, Texas wanted to join the Union too, sparking a fresh debate in the war of words between the slave and free states. The South, predictably, wanted Texas to be slave; the North wished it to be free. As a result, Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the admission of Texas. This bill also stated that up to four new states should thereafter be entitled to admission, with the Missouri Compromise to govern whether they were slave or free.

Unfortunately, the admission of Texas also helped provoke the Mexican War, which gained the United States the territories of California and New Mexico. It was assumed by the people of those territories that New Mexico and California would be free states, and so California promptly formed a free state constitution. But the South would not give up so easily, as all of New Mexico and the southern half of California should be under the influence of slavery, as decreed by the Missouri Compromise. They proposed an extension of the Missouri Compromise, but the residents of the territories wished to remain free, as they had been under Mexican laws.

This is where the idea of popular sovereignty sprang up. Popular sovereignty was the suggestion that the people of a territory should be able to choose for themselves whether they would be under the influence of slavery or not. Douglas was an avid supporter of this proposal; Lincoln thought slavery should be banned from the territories altogether. At the debate in Freeport, this issue came officially out into the open. In his opening speech, Lincoln posed this question: “Can the people of a United States Territory . . . exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution?”

Douglas responded with an emphatic “yes,” winning him the senatorial election of 1858 but dooming him to failure in the presidential race two years later.

At the time of the senatorial elections of 1858, several French families lived in Illinois. They had traveled up the Mississippi before the Louisiana Purchase had been made. They brought their slaves with them, and for a while their right to keep their slaves went uncontested. But soon their neighbors protested the laws that allowed them, and no one else, to own slaves in the state of Illinois. Lincoln, a strong abolitionist, wanted the French to be no exception, and had strong support among the people. But Douglas won the election; at that time, elections were decided by the state legislature. Douglas beat Lincoln fifty-four votes to forty-six.

Douglas’ answer to Lincoln’s fateful question had an enormous impact on national history. Two years after the senatorial election, Lincoln and Douglas found themselves facing each other once again; this time they vied for the presidency. But that single crucial question made Douglas an unfit candidate to the vast majority of the people in the South, and so Lincoln won the presidency. Then the southern states seceded, and the Civil War descended upon the nation, tearing brother from brother, father from son. Soon Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves, who wasted no time in traveling up to the North to fight for the Union cause. Eager to back up their president, the people of the Union encouraged Lincoln, and the people of Illinois were some of those people. Individual families, entire towns, even world famous businesses, such as the whiskey business of Peoria, Illinois, sent their support. Because of the determination of Lincoln and his people, the United States of America was reunited and slavery abolished for all time.

The Freeport debate, and, more specifically, Lincoln's critical question, shaped the entire history of the United States. Without the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the French might still have their slaves, and the Union might be made up of only the free states of the 1800s, the southern states having split off to form their own country. Slavery might still be a factor, with thousands of innocent humans forced to work for free. The world would be devoid of the powerful figure of the United States of America. Without the Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Freeport, Lincoln might never have become president, and so half of the United States would be denied freedom. [From LaWanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom*; Lionel Crocker, *An Analysis of Lincoln and Douglas as Public Speakers and Debaters*; John J. Dunphy, "Lincoln Douglas Debate at Alton." *Illinois Magazine* (1973); John Hay, and John G. Nicolay. *Abraham Lincoln*; Jerry Klein, *A Pictorial History*; *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. 12 Feb. 1991. National Park Service. <<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates2.htm>> (Aug. 27, 2007); Marian Mills Miller, *Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln*; Ralph G. Newman, *Lincoln for the Ages*; and W. T. Rawleigh, *Freeport's Lincoln*.]

## **Seventh Day of History: Lincoln-Douglas Debates**

Kane Weinberg  
All Saints Academy, Breese  
Teacher: Stephanie Garcia

Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas traveled across the state of Illinois in 1858, competing for a seat in the U. S. Senate. Douglas was a senator from Illinois and Lincoln was a relatively unknown lawyer at the time. Lincoln and some of his followers thought that by debating Douglas this would assure that Lincoln would be on the same stage with Douglas. Lincoln and Douglas, well known for their opposing views, went head to head on the issue of slavery, one of the most controversial issues at the time. Lincoln was antislavery and Douglas believed in popular sovereignty, which meant letting the territories decide if slavery should be allowed or not. Although Douglas would go on to win the election and maintain his Senate seat, Lincoln gained national recognition, a step towards his presidency.

The place selected for the last of the seven debates, was Alton, Illinois, on October 15, 1858. This debate was very important since it gave voters the opportunity to hear two sides of an issue. Lincoln and Douglas, using the forum of a debate, and the power of persuasive speaking, attempted to influence the minds of the voters. Even though today we see presidential candidates debate rather often, in the 1800s it was a very unusual event.

Alton, located just twenty miles north of St. Louis, had a population of 6,900 at the time, but another six thousand gathered to watch the debate. Although there were not as many spectators watching the Alton debate as the other six, those in attendance showed considerable enthusiasm. Both debaters were greeted warmly, receiving large

rounds of applause as they took the stage and began debating. Lincoln and Douglas debated over three and a half hours going back and forth on the issues of slavery. This was the last debate in the series, and the last chance for either candidate to reveal their thoughts and viewpoints, especially on the issue of slavery. Not only was Alton put on the map by the popularity of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, but it was also a place where Elijah Lovejoy, an abolitionist, and a popular newspaper editor, was tragically murdered for his beliefs.

Douglas, the first to speak, set the tone for the rest of the debate. He started by attacking Lincoln's policies on slavery and criticizing him on the previous debates. Douglas believed the territories should decide on their own if slavery would be allowed or not. As he continued speaking, he was often interrupted by long and loud rounds of support. He told the crowd that Lincoln was interfering with the people's rights and that by abolishing slavery it would turn the North and South into enemies, not friends and lead to a "house divided." At the end of his speech, Douglas assured the crowds of people that he, and no one else, would make the best Senator.

Abraham Lincoln, who spoke next, told the people that Senator Douglas' words, if he did not know better, sounded like he and Lincoln were side by side. It was unclear what Douglas truly believed because more and more, it sounded like he was agreeing with Lincoln. Lincoln's followers would at times yell out things such as "right" and "true" as he made his comments. Lincoln then said that Douglas, in his statements, had "misrepresented" Lincoln and often stated "untruths" about him, accusing Douglas of using his material from an earlier speech presented in Chicago. Towards the end of the

debate, Lincoln announced that, “All men have the right to strive to be the best they can, but when enslaved they will never have that opportunity.”

Lincoln and Douglas both debated furiously in the senatorial race. Lincoln was a relatively unknown figure before the debates began, but afterwards he became nationally recognized. Although Douglas would win the election in 1858, and was reelected Senator, Lincoln would win the presidential election of 1860.

Lincoln, with his determination, kept pursuing politics even though he was not very successful at first. He knew the country could not survive as half-free and half-slave. Once he became president he pushed for the abolition of slavery, which was what he debated time and time again.

Even though Lincoln and Douglas were both excellent debaters, they had many differences. Lincoln was born into a poor family in Kentucky, while Douglas was born into a wealthy family in Vermont. However, as the years passed, they both became involved in politics. Lincoln was formerly a member of the Whig Party, but later became a Republican. He was a Republican at the time of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. Douglas, a Democrat, served in the U. S. Senate for many years. Both of these men, Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, are known today as two of the best debaters that history has ever seen, and Lincoln has gone down as one of the greatest presidents the United States has ever known. [From Gabor Boritt, *The Historian's Lincoln*; Russell Freedman, *Lincoln*; Doris Goodwin, *The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*; Richard Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas*; Jeff Ruetsche, *This Day in History*; Saul Sigelschiffer, *The American Conscience*; Travelers and Other Observers, *Prairie State*; and David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery*.]



## **On This Day – The Lincoln-Douglas Debates**

Maddy Wilson  
All Saints Academy, Breese  
Teacher: Stephanie Garcia

Life as we know it today differs significantly from life in 1858. Due to its controversial nature, slavery, while still legal in 1858, divided the nation. It was in this setting that two men, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas ran for the Illinois seat in the United States Senate. The winner of the election would gain control of the Senate for his party. Douglas, a Democrat, agreed to debate with Lincoln, a professional lawyer and Republican, in order to inform the voters of each man's viewpoint regarding the key issues of the campaign.

One debate of particular importance took place in Freeport, Illinois on August 27, 1858. Lincoln, while debating in Freeport, a city known for its abolitionists, made sure he touched on the real issue, slavery. Lincoln believed it was immoral to own slaves and wanted to convince the voters that slavery was unconstitutional. Unlike Lincoln, Douglas, a powerful and well-known politician, supported slavery and accused Northerners of exaggerating the anti-slavery issue. Although most believe Lincoln did not come out ahead in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, he never wavered in his belief that slavery was wrong and should be abolished. This idea would eventually evolve into freedom for all slaves.

When Douglas agreed to debate Lincoln, he proposed that one event should take place in each of the nine Congressional Districts of Illinois, excluding Chicago and Springfield. Freeport, the Second Illinois Congressional District, is located in the far northwestern corner of Illinois, was chosen as the site for the second, and ultimately most

important, debate. On August 17, 1858, Freeport's population of 5,000 tripled to 15,000 with curious onlookers eagerly awaiting the debate. Not even the bad weather could keep the crowds from traveling from miles around to watch Lincoln and Douglas square off regarding the legality of slavery.

As the debate began, Lincoln's objective was to take a strong offensive stance since he was criticized for being too defensive in the first debate which was in Ottawa, Illinois. Douglas posed many questions at the end of the Ottawa debate. Lincoln took his turn in Freeport answering those same questions. After answering the questions posed by Douglas, Lincoln responded with some of his own questions. The second question posed to Douglas proved the most significant in determining the ultimate outcome of the debate. Lincoln, knowing full well that Douglas supported the territories' right to govern themselves, asked whether the people of a territory could exclude slavery, given the validity of the Dred Scott decision, in which the United States Supreme Court ruled that black Americans were not considered citizens of the United States and Congress had no power to outlaw slavery in specific states. With this question, Lincoln essentially set a trap for Douglas. If Douglas answered "yes," he would be supporting the possibility of anti-slavery legislation, something he clearly did not favor. If he answered "no," he would be criticizing the Dred Scott decision, which had already become law. However, blinded by Lincoln's question, Douglas replied that a state could outlaw slavery through legislation regardless of the Dred Scott decision. This statement drew harsh criticism from Southerners and eventually became known as the Freeport Doctrine. While he won the debate, Douglas became known by these comments about slavery and eventually lost the Southerners' support.

Aside from their differing viewpoints on slavery, the two men differed in both appearance and lifestyle. Lincoln's tall and thin frame towered over Douglas' short and stocky stature. Lincoln's clothing often looked rumpled, while Douglas always appeared impeccably dressed. Even Lincoln's high and thin voice contrasted with Douglas' deep and smooth one. Douglas, having considerably more money than Lincoln, traveled in a first-class manner, while Lincoln took advantage of whatever transportation was available. In addition, the debates brought focus on the contrast in personalities between the two men. Douglas, a popular politician of the time, possessed a strong presence and conveyed great confidence and energy during the debate; on the other hand, Lincoln appeared unsophisticated, unsure of himself, and sometimes even awkward. However, when Lincoln spoke about an issue of great importance to him, he conveyed honesty and integrity. His humble nature and pleasant sense of humor earned the respect of many spectators. The people knew that they could count on Lincoln, knowing that he always spoke the truth.

Although Lincoln did not win election to the U. S. Senate, his debates with Douglas paved the way for Lincoln's future success in politics. Lincoln earned the respect of the people with his humble and honest style. Further, he proved a worthy opponent for Douglas especially during the Freeport debate by highlighting the contrast between the law and the immorality of slavery. This set the stage for Lincoln's presidential policy and ultimately for freedom of all slaves. [From Jack Allen, *Teacher's Guide for American Society*; Paul Angle, *Created Equal?*; Allan Carpenter, *Land of Lincoln*; Richard Allen Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas*; Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of*

*Lincoln*; and Saul Sigelschiffer, *The American Conscience – The Drama of the Lincoln – Douglas Debates.*]

## **The Lincoln-Douglas Debate in Jonesboro, Illinois**

Eleni Yannelis

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

The Jonesboro debate centered on Stephen A. Douglas' Freeport Doctrine in which he held that local authorities should choose whether or not to enforce federal laws.

Jonesboro was the third in a series of seven formal debates between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln in 1858. Both men sought a seat in the U.S. Senate, and they argued primarily about the moral and political aspects of slavery. At Jonesboro, Lincoln accused Douglas of being unfaithful to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution. Douglas countered by saying that "Thomas Jefferson meant only English people when he said, 'All men are created equal and all men should be free.'" Lincoln responded that Jefferson meant all people are created equal whether they are black or white.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates were the first time such a forum was used to determine political office. One candidate spoke for an hour; the other spoke for an hour and a half; the candidate speaking then concluded with a half hour rejoinder. This format, revolutionary in 1858, continues to be the standard for high school debates as well as some contemporary presidential debates. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates were particularly important because they focused public attention on important economic, political, and social issues.

During the Freeport debate, Lincoln tried to force Douglas to indicate whether or not slavery was constitutional. Douglas believed in popular sovereignty, the notion that each territory should decide for itself whether slavery would exist within its boundaries since the Constitution did not strictly prohibit it. On the other hand, Abraham Lincoln

thought that the U. S. Supreme Court should decide whether slavery would exist in a territory.

The U. S. Supreme Court had previously addressed slavery in the Dred Scott case of 1856. Dred Scott, a black man who was the slave of a military officer from Missouri, had moved with his owner first to Illinois and then to Wisconsin, both free states, before finally settling in Missouri, a slave state. When his master died, Scott thought he should be free. In 1846, a group of abolitionists helped him bring his case to the U. S. Supreme Court, where seven out of nine judges ruled that no slave or descendent of a slave could become a U.S. citizen; a slave was the property of his owner. This ruling was particularly controversial because black men had been able to vote in five states in 1776: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut.

Douglas championed “popular sovereignty.” He argued that a state was created by the will of its people, and consequently, people are the source of a state’s political power. Douglas’ position may have been an excuse to delay a ruling on whether or not slavery was acceptable. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that “Douglas feels from experience he has had, that he cannot maintain popular sovereignty and Dred Scottism in the speech.” Douglas also argued that blacks were not U.S. citizens. He said, "A negro is naught and ought naught to be an American citizen." Most people in Southern Illinois agreed with this statement, including Lincoln.

Slavery raised important economic, moral, and social issues. In the Jonesboro debate, Douglas claimed that Lincoln was “inviting warfare between the North and the South, to be carried on with ruthless vengeance.” Southern plantations required intensive labor. Slaves not only provided this labor, they vastly increased the owners’ profit since

slaves were not paid. Southerners believed that an end to slavery would destroy the plantation system and drastically alter their way of life as a result. On the other hand, many people in the North, such as Quakers, felt that slavery was morally wrong and that all people were equal. Abolition was prevalent in the North but banned in the South, where teachers suspected of supporting it were fired and abolitionist literature was burned.

Lincoln and Douglas were both campaigning for a seat in the U. S. Senate. Douglas originally tried to avoid debating Lincoln, but pressure from the public forced him to reconsider. Since Douglas ultimately wanted to be president, he realized that any attention gained would be beneficial.

Most believe that Lincoln won the debates even though he lost the senatorial election. Lincoln wanted to keep slavery within those states that already had it and to prevent its expansion to new states joining the Union. Lincoln was better received in most places, even southern Illinois, because Douglas had originally tried to dodge the debates. "It is useless for Judge Douglas to attempt to conceal the real reason for his refusal to meet Mr. Lincoln. There is no disguising the fact that the "little dodger" is afraid of the "Long Abe" on the stump. He dare not go over the State with him and subject his sophisticates and humbugs to the others raking broadsides."

In the long run, the debates were beneficial to Lincoln because they gave him national exposure. They also focused the nation's attention on slavery and established debate as a valuable part of the democratic election process. [From Ray B. Basler, "Third Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Jonesboro, Illinois September 15, 1858." *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. 2006. The National Park Service.

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